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■ **Brecht**
■ **Reviews:**
Genetics. Jazz.
1968. Kollantai

US Stock Market in August

MAULED BY THE CELTIC TIGER

Class Polarisation in Ireland

Northern Ireland: Time for Socialist Politics

The Fight Against Racism

Tony Cliff Interview

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Editorial THERE IS a new generation of socialists emerging in Ireland today, North and South, who find themselves in a situation where the grip of old conservative institutions like the Catholic Church and the Orange Order have been shaken by repeated crises and the capitalist recession which began in South East Asia is just now spreading to the West. Workers in Belfast and Dublin are increasingly cynical about the myths of the free market (the new term for capitalism).

It is a situation which is potentially very favourable for socialists. Yet the main organisations of the left are either experiencing a major decline or are gripped with extreme pessimism about the possibility of class struggle and of socialism. The last few years have seen a rush to embrace the free market by reformist parties like Labour and Democratic Left, and the republican leadership of Sinn Féin. Our trade union leaders, almost without exception, preach the mantra of cooperation with the employers.

Rebuilding the strong socialist and trade union movement that we need is therefore not simply a question of organisation and activism. It is also a question of politics.

We need to learn from the mistakes of previous generations, rediscover the alternative tradition of revolutionary socialism, and bring a Marxist understanding to the struggles of today. That is the reason for producing this first issue of Socialist Worker Review. For the moment, it is intended to be an occasional publication, but we hope to build it into a regular magazine of socialist debate and discussion, which can begin to fill that gap in socialist theory.

In this issue, Kieran Allen looks at the politics of the Celtic Tiger and what the limits of the economic boom mean for workers' struggles in the South. The peace process in the North carries the hopes of thousands who want to see an end to sectarianism and the carnage of Omagh and Ballymoney. Colm Bryce asks if the peace process can deliver and outlines the socialist alternative.

The dangers in the current political situation are clear from the dramatic rise of racism in Ireland. Marnie Holborow traces the rise in racism Europe to the problems of our capitalist rulers and argues for a socialist strategy for fighting racism. Tony Cliff, of the SWP in Britain, is one of the founders of the international socialist tradition. We include a reprint of recent interview where he outlines the basic features of that tradition and how he sees the prospects for socialists today.

This year is the centenary of the birth of the revolutionary playwright and poet Bertold Brecht. His active political life and writing coincided some of the most momentous political events this century. Jenny Witt looks at how his political beliefs were reflected in his art. A packed review section looks at recent books on the revolutionary year of 1968, biology and genetics, women's liberation and more.

We would welcome comments or contributions for future issues and enquiries about subscriptions.



Mauled by the Celtic Tiger: Class Polarisation in Ireland

Hardly anyone believes that the Celtic Tiger is benefitting workers. Less clear however is the degree to which workers are gaining confidence to fight. Kieran Allen assesses the effects of class polarisation today.

IRELAND IS the fastest growing economy in the OECD. In the past, a handful of cranes on the Dublin skyline was taken as an indicator of economic health. Today these standards seem puny as the city is transformed by the building boom.

Traditional concerns about emigration have given way to new discussions on skill shortages. For the first time economic migrants are coming to Ireland, only to be described as 'illegals' just like the Irish were in America a decade previously. The boom is also changing the structure of the labour force. More women have become paid employees in the last five years than in the previous twenty years combined.

One of the most comprehensive accounts of the boom has come from Paul Sweeney, the research officer for Ireland's largest union SIPTU. His book *The Celtic Tiger* is of particular interest because it summarises the perspective of the labour leaders who have grown close to the political elite.

Reading the book, you are first struck by the pulsating optimism that derives from a new economic patriotism. "The Irish miracle," Sweeney claims has been "built on a solid modern foundation on which a lasting edifice can be built". Ireland has the potential to become, "one of the leading world's leading economies". Possible worries about the comparison between the Celtic and Asian Tigers are quickly dismissed.

The Asian Tigers were built on high levels of investment but had the "body of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the legs of Woody Allen". Why that particular physique does not also apply to the Irish economy built around huge multi-nationals and a myriad of small firms is not explained. More importantly, Sweeney comforts himself with the notion that the particular form of Asian capitalism — ironically once hailed as the recipe for success — is to blame for the crisis rather than the anarchic nature of capitalism itself.

Sweeney claims that social partnership between the unions and the employers produced the boom and then credits the Left with advocating these policies. But what is the nature of this Left? Sweeney argues that:

The parties of the Irish Left — Labour, the Workers Party, Democratic Left and the trade unions — did not believe that more public spending was the solution to problems, unlike the Left in the UK and

elsewhere.

And as if there is any doubt about this commitment to austerity, Sweeney sternly tells us that 'there has been widespread abuse of the social welfare system'. Sweeney also champions "flexibility" in a way that reveals the vast gulf between union leaders and their membership. So we are told that:

Many (workers) to their surprise find that they enjoy the change that being multi-skilled gives them, or the flexibility of annualised hours, while some like part time working and others see the advantages of flexible payments systems such as gain sharing.

The book is replete with enthusiasm for enterprise culture, competitiveness, and new forms of work organisation which are supposed to be about 'empowerment' rather than crude devices to raise the rate of exploitation.

It is sometimes difficult to believe that the book was written by a leading trade unionist. But Sweeney's approach to the Celtic Tiger reflects both the continuity and the change within the reformist left in Ireland.

Throughout the eighties the main party for working class militants in Southern Ireland was the Workers Party. It combined a strong class rhetoric with a belief that there had to be an Irish Industrial Revolution before politics split on class lines. The cadre of the party looked to regimes of Eastern Europe and North Korea as successful models of development and defended them as 'socialist' states. However, there was also another thread running through its politics. Reacting to its own republican past, the Workers Party argued that Irish underdevelopment did not result from colonialism but rather from a 'lazy' Irish bourgeoisie. The multinationals were seen as the key agency for promoting industrial development.

This contradictory mix began to unravel at the end of the eighties. The party had grown during a period of downturn in working class struggle and many of its supporters slid easily into positions in the union bureaucracy.

The pressure of that milieu pushed them into a greater accommodation with Irish capitalism. More crucially, the collapse of Eastern Europe shattered their whole outlook. Having held up these tyrannies as examples of 'actually existing socialism', they then shifted to arguing there was no viable alternative to capitalism. With all the enthusiasm of school children released at the sound of the bell, the bulk of the party split off to form Democratic Left, discarding their clumsy Stalinist baggage and racing to a terrain that was somewhere between the liberal wing of Fine Gael and the Labour Party. The talk about industrial development as a 'stage' towards class confrontation,

has now given way to straightforward industrial development. As Sweeney is a supporter of Democratic Left it is not surprising that his book simply offers a celebration, rather than a critique, of the Celtic Tiger.

War on workers

Fortunately there are others who are more critical. Groupings such as the Combat Poverty Agency and the Conference of Religious in Ireland have produced devastating reports that show the reality of inequality behind the hype. Even the St Vincent de Paul has offered a searing indictment of Irish capitalism by showing that over 200,000 people are in receipt of its charity. However while these criticisms are welcome, they are limited by their failure to see that the key division in Irish society is between workers and employers. Instead, groups such as CORI argue that only the 'marginalised' are losing out from the boom. The fashionable term 'the marginalised' refers to groupings such as the long term unemployed and social welfare recipients more generally.

Many involved in the religious and poverty lobby organisations accept the argument of the US economist Galbraith, that modern capitalism is characterised by a 'contented majority' which makes up two thirds of the population and a 'marginalised' minority who have lost out to selfishness. Looked at from this point of view the interests of the poor conflict not only with the captains of industry, but also with state or private sector employees. Critical commentators such as Vincent Browne, who embrace this perspective, can therefore be extremely radical in denouncing Irish capitalism — but then adopt quite right wing views when it comes to public sector employees.

The poor have certainly lost out in the Celtic Tiger. The numbers below the poverty line has increased from 31% to 34% of the population. Yet far from only the 'marginalised groupings' losing out, the majority of PAYE workers have not gained from the Celtic Tiger. The rate of exploitation of Irish workers has dramatically increased in the last decade as a war has been fought to transfer wealth from workers to their employers.

The most obvious sign of this is the decline in national income going to wages compared to profits. In 1996 the share of the economy going to wages was only 63% compared to 73% in 1987 and 82% in 1971. This is well below the average for the European Union which stood at 72% in 1996. One of the reasons for this decline has been the growing proportion of the Irish workforce who are officially classified as low paid.

Today Ireland has the second highest proportion of its workforce on low pay in all the industrialised economies. The gap between the super-salaries of the company directors and managers and the low paid workforce has increased enormously. The ratio of the hourly earnings of the top 10% to the bottom 10% for men, increased from 3.5 times to 5 times between 1987 and 1994.

One of the main ways the war on the working class is being fought is on the issue of productivity. According to the partnership approach, both workers and employers should gain from the substantial increases in productivity.

Yet there is no evidence of this. Between 1980 and 1995, real unit labour costs fell in Ireland by 19 percent compared to a drop of 10 percent in Japan, 2.4 percent in the UK and 0.8 percent in the US. Yet wage rises in the decade of social partnership have barely kept pace with inflation — and that is only the



official figure for inflation, which is manipulated by the exclusion of items like housing and rent.

This dramatic fall in unit labour costs cannot be accounted for by a rise in investment in machinery. The striking feature of the Irish boom is that it has not been accompanied by any substantial rise in investment. Productivity has risen mainly because the social partnership arrangements began with a massive shake-out of Irish industry. In 1981, there were 363,000 employed in Irish industry yet by 1987, the first year of the Programme for National Recovery, the figure was 300,000. Even by 1996 the numbers employed in industry had not reached the figure of 1981. Instead the union leaders have presided over a regime where the 'frontier of control' on the shop floor has shifted back to management. Shop steward organisation has been weakened, as the partnership agreement gave managers virtually a free hand to promote widescale productivity changes in return for small pay rises. Virtually every job today has seen demands for annualised hours, a device for removing overtime and Saturday premium payments; yellow pack grades where new workers are paid less than older workers; flexibility in deployment; and the erosion of craft demarcation lines in order to intensify work efforts.

The war to increase productivity and restrain wages has been accompanied by wider changes at a political level where the wealthy have succeeded in significantly reducing their tax bills. The Celtic Tiger was established through creating a low tax haven for the multi-nationals inside the EU. Tax on

The spontaneous action spearheaded by Aer Lingus shop stewards during the Ryanair battle showed the power of workers to terrify an establishment.

company profits from manufacturing exports stands at a mere 10% and this encourages the multi-nationals to engage in transfer pricing where they artificially declare higher profits in Ireland. But this concession to the rich is only the tip of the iceberg. Tax evasion of even these low tax rates is encouraged.

As many as 40,000 foreign accounts exist in Ireland as a device for avoiding tax. Although it has been acknowledged that some of these may be used to launder criminal assets, Mary Harney has also pointed out that closing them down might endanger legitimate business.

In the decade of social partnership the clamouring of the rich for tax cuts has grown even louder and has been accepted by the main parties. In 1988, the top tax rate on company profits stood at 50% but by 1996 it had fallen to 36%. By 2010, all companies in Ireland will be paying a reduced rate of 12.5% — putting banks profits on a lower tax rate than that paid by a low paid worker. Taxes on inheritance, capital gains, and property have all been cut substantially. But even these officially low tax rates on the rich disguise the reality.

Over the last decade, pressure has grown for all manner of tax reliefs to reduce the tax bill further. The most recent report of the Revenue Commissioners shows that relief can be claimed on items as diverse as stallion stud fees, commercial woodland, income from foreign trusts and, the catch all, 'research and development'. This last category, for example, allowed the Elan corporation in Athlone to come away with a tax bill of less than 1% on its profits. In all, tax relief on capital amounts to a staggering £2,258 million.

The policy of cutting taxes on the rich is presented by all the main parties as being in the interest of everyone. It simply is not true. PAYE workers pay a higher rate of tax than most other countries and enjoy lower provision of social services. The tax cuts to the rich has led to a form of social vandalism where basic services are run down. Irish primary schools have the lowest spending per head in Europe.

Despite the expanding computer industry, school children still have to collect Tesco tokens to furnish their schools with the odd computer. Ten times more hospital beds per head of the population have been cut in Ireland than anywhere else in Europe. Dublin is the only city in Europe where there is no major subsidy given for public transport. Its present traffic chaos may have something to do with the fact that there were more buses on Dublin's streets in the mid sixties than there are today even though the population has doubled.

The growth in huge inequalities of income during the Irish boom is a reflection of the pattern elsewhere. At the end of the twentieth century global capitalism is characterised by lower rates of growth compared to its Golden Age between the post war period and the late sixties. Recessions have been more frequent and the recoveries are more short lived and shallow. The older mechanisms that guaranteed sustained growth, principally the permanent arms economy, no longer function so well. Although profits have risen, there is still a longer term pressure for the rate of return on investment to fall. Commenting on the recent boom

in the USA for example, Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Bank in the US claimed that although profit 'margins are (the) highest in a generation. They are still below those that prevailed in the 1960s'.

As a result, the booms of the late twentieth century have a different character to those of the sixties. In 1961, during his inaugural address the US President John F Kennedy claimed that 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. Even though this was a myth, workers did experience some real improvements in living standards. Yet more than thirty years later, the May 1993 edition of Newsweek parodied that promise with an article on growing inequality in America headlined 'A Rising Tide Lifts the Yachts'. The reason for the change relates back to the longer term decline in the rate of profit. As Marx pointed out, capitalists seek to reverse this trend by either increasing 'absolute surplus value' — increasing the length of the working year through, for example, demands for annualised hours, or by increasing 'relative surplus value' through increasing the intensity of work. The third method of wage cutting is more appropriate to a slump in the economy.

The boom and the revival of militancy

SOMETIMES on the Left there is a mechanical understanding of the relationship between economic booms and slumps and working class consciousness. Here an economic crisis is thought to be always favourable for engendering a revolutionary consciousness while a boom is supposed to pacify the working class.

However, this has never been the approach taken by authentic Marxists. Writing in 1921, when capitalism seemed to stabilise itself after the upheavals of the post war period, Trotsky argued for understanding the dialectical interaction between booms and workers consciousness. He pointed out that under particular conditions an economic slump can devastate the workers' movement. After the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia, for example, the terrible economic crisis of 1907-1909 disheartened workers and killed the revolutionary movement. An improvement in the economic situation was necessary before the labour movement revived.

Commenting on the economic revival between 1910 and 1913, Trotsky argued that: "There was an improvement in our economic situation and a favourable conjuncture which acted to reassemble the demoralised and devitalized workers who had lost courage. They realised again how important they were in production; and they passed over to an offensive, first in the economic field and later in the political field as well"

He generalised from this experience by arguing that where the working class enters a slump following a period of retreat and defeats, the economic crisis can be a factor in adding to desperation and demoralisation.

By contrast: "The industrial revival is bound, first of all, to raise the self confidence of the working class, undermined by failures and disunity in

its own ranks; it is bound to fuse the working class together in the factories and plants and heighten the desire for unanimity in militant actions."

This interaction between the boom and working class consciousness is very much evident in Ireland. The 'shakeouts' in industry in the eighties combined with political weaknesses that could not deal with the oncoming recession destroyed the militancy that had grown with the tax marches and the occupations of plants like Ranks and Clondalkin Paper Mills. The defeats made it easier for the bureaucracy to impose the partnership arrangements and to give tacit support to the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act — a piece of legislation which strengthened their hand. This shift in the balance of forces emboldened the employers to take on key groups like the Waterford Glass workers and impose wage cuts on them. Where workers sought to resist, they felt they needed the protection of the union official before they could move.

Today the situation has started to change. As a result of the boom workers feel they are more needed and awareness of their economic muscle is returning. The constant talk of Irish economic success has raised expectations as workers contrast their lives with the super-salaries of their managers and directors. All of this takes place against a background of major change in the international workers movement. Since the general strike in France in December 1995, workers have re-entered the stage as a fighting force. Those who wrote off militancy and the working class in the name of globalisation and the 'post-industrial age' are in for a sharp shock.

The revival of the working class can be traced through a number of important bench marks. Firstly, there was the 42% vote against Partnership 2,000 in SIPTU, and the high votes recorded by Carolann Duggan who stood openly as a Socialist Workers Party member for various elections in that union — something an older demoralised network of militants had never attempted.

Second, there has been the re-emergence of rank and file groups for the first time in over a decade. The Busworkers Action Group was able to call a stoppage over CIE's viability plan and force the company to back off from an all-out attack on conditions. Building Workers Against the Black Economy were able to defy High Court injunction and wipe out sub-contracting in some skilled trades. The National Loco Drivers Committee is another group that threatens to bring the trains to standstill.

Third, there has been the re-emergence of unofficial action, often sporadic but also quite devastating in its effects. The wave of unofficial strikes among hospital and local authorities showed how the rank and file could start to take control of their own unions. At the height of the strike wave over 200 shop stewards and union activists — mainly from the craft unions — gathered to formulate strategy and vote on whether there should be further action. More dramatically, the spontaneous action spearheaded by Aer Lingus shop stewards during the Ryanair battle showed the power of workers to terrify an establishment... Unfortunately the bureaucracy was able to close down this action in the nick of time, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. However while the boom has helped the workers movement to recover, the marks of the

defeats of the last period have not disappeared. Shop floor organisation has withered during the decade of partnership and in some jobs the ratio of shop stewards to members is quite low. The absence of the strong shop floor organisation has given powerful bureaucracies, such as exist in SIPTU, room to manoeuvre. Although the union is now effectively led by Des Geraghty who can produce a vacuous rhetoric about 'jungle capitalism', the 'machine' is still run by right wing Labour Party bureaucrats who still fight with all the enthusiasm and outlook of a John Charles McQuaid. The important point is that they suffered defeats — but while workers have learnt to say No to their recommendations in many ballots, it still necessary to construct independent shop floor organisation and networks that can push them aside.

Politics is the key factor here. During the last great boom in the sixties, syndicalist militancy — a focus on industrial issues alone — was often sufficient to generate a spontaneous rank and file rebellion that took the form of break-aways unions, absolute respect for the pick line and a pattern of leapfrogging gains previously made. Yet even then, militants needed a political party which functioned as a school of tactics and strategy. In the car industry in Dublin, for example, the Communist Party won a base this way. Today, the call to keep politics out of the unions is far more dangerous. Almost every battle today brings workers up quickly against political questions as the bureaucracy takes up ideological arguments about globalisation, the need for competitiveness, the absence of a 'realistic' alternative to capitalism. Thousands of shop stewards have been through union training courses which push the idea that the employers are partners rather than class enemies. As frustration grow under the Celtic Tiger, racist arguments and confused ideas about recourse to the law can make their appearance on the shop floor. This need to be taken on and challenged openly. Where this is done, like at the recent teachers' conference, anti-racist arguments can gain ground.

Politics is also important because flat-minded economism fails to pick up the ideological difficulties confronting the ruling class. Corruption is part and parcel of capitalism but at times of change and instability, as Japan and South Korea have proved, capitalists are less successful at keeping it hidden. The present difficulties for Fianna Fail — the deepening and disgusting mire of payments to politicians and tax evasion - will roll and roll. The ideological prop of the Catholic church has also been taken out from under them. While many workers have almost come to expect dishonesty of their rotten politicians, the sheer extent of it can fuel political radicalisation, particularly when workers are beginning to take action themselves. In Italy, industrial struggle and demonstrations which literally chased politicians into jail fed into each other. Seeing that industrial action gets results can convert cynicism into demanding justice.

The building of a mass rank and file movement therefore requires a strong political backbone. In the past two years, revolutionary socialists have shown that they can make an impact in the unions by connecting with the immediate outbreaks of anger over the Celtic Tiger. The challenge now is to translate this into permanent network of socialist militants.

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There has been the re-emergence of rank and file groups for the first time in over a decade.

The events of the summer in the North have highlighted the dead-end of armed republicanism and also exposed a deep crisis within Unionism. For the moment many hopes are focused on the new Assembly. Colm Bryce argues that the major changes in the North will not be addressed by the new political structures and examines the opportunities for socialists.

The Left in the North After the Referendum

THE OMAGH bombing represents a watershed in Northern Ireland politics. It has exposed the strategy of armed republicanism as politically bankrupt.

The killing of 28 people and the injuring of hundreds more, brought to the surface once again the deep revulsion towards republican and loyalist violence felt by most ordinary people in the North. Omagh happened just a month after the murder by loyalists of the three Quinn brothers in Ballymoney, which led to a similar collapse in support for the Orange Order's standoff at Drumcree.

Both events jarred deeply with the expectations of workers. The idea that young people should be killed to "preserve the union" or to "free Ireland" now leaves most with a sick, empty feeling. It is this, much more than the threats of "draconian new laws" and "crack-downs" by the British and Irish governments, that has finished off the strategy of armed republicanism and the loyalist paramilitaries.

The reaction to Omagh and Ballymoney reflects profound shifts in attitudes among Protestants and Catholics in the North in the last 10 years. The 1996 Social Attitudes Survey showed that 82 per cent of people in the North would prefer to live in mixed neighbourhoods and 96 per cent wanted to work in a mixed workplace. In addition, 62 per cent would prefer to send their kids to mixed schools. Significantly, 43 per cent believed relationships between Protestants and Catholics would be better in five years time, compared to 25 per cent in 1989.

Can the Assembly deliver?

For the time being, the reaction to Omagh and Ballymoney is likely to fuel hopes that the peace settlement can be made to work, for the simple reason that there appears to be nothing else on offer. The same vague hope lay behind the high vote in favour of the peace referendum in June.

Less obviously, the demand for peace also coincides with an important desire that working class issues be addressed. The North has the highest rates of child poverty and low pay in the whole of Britain, and the highest rates of infant mortality and poverty related illness. Average household incomes remain 13 per cent lower than in Britain. The same Social Attitudes Survey shows an increasing concern at the effect of cuts in the health service, with 88 per cent listing health as first or second preference for government spending.

Earlier this year, 20,000 people demonstrated in Dungannon against the closure of acute services in the local hospital. The Tyrone hospital in Omagh, which bore the brunt of the casualties from the recent bomb, has also been targeted for a run down in acute services.

Yet it is inevitable that such hopes for a lessening of sectarianism and the tackling of major social issues like health and unemployment will be disappointed by the new Assembly. The new political struc-

tures are designed to modernise and institutionalise sectarian division. The ruling elites in Britain and Ireland want a structure which replaces the civil conflict with economic competition between the two sections of the working class. These provide the best conditions under which Northern Ireland can be preserved as a low pay paradise for multi-national firms. The notion of "two communities" and "two identities" is the hallmark of every aspect of the peace agreement. Which "community" will benefit and which will lose out, is the key question against which every issue will be debated and voted on.

This framework is accepted by all of the main parties, including the new "working class" loyalist parties such as the DUP, and Sinn Féin. Far from offering the potential for class politics to emerge from within the Assembly, both parties have their base in separate communities and continually emphasise points of division rather than common interest.

The DUP has based its appeal on an alternative to "fur-coat Unionism" for Protestant workers. But they operate within the framework of communal politics where they fight for 'their' working class supporters against the 'other side'. In early August, for instance, DUP leader Billy Hutchinson said that he "feared for the future of the peace process" because "the perception within Protestant areas is that republican areas are getting all the benefits of new investment and government grants."

Sinn Féin has the same communal approach. Since recognising the failure of the armed struggle in the early 1990's, the Provisionals have dropped any of their former radical rhetoric in favour of an alliance with the middle-class SDLP and Fianna Fáil in the South, and ties with the Clinton administration in the US. Party representatives even welcomed Clinton to Ireland after he bombed the Sudan and Afghanistan. Their emphasis now is on winning "cultural equality" for nationalists, through funding for the Irish language and the removal of British symbols from public buildings. Such tokenism offers little to its own supporters in Catholic working class areas and even less to working class Protestants.

High hopes and false dawns

Sinn Féin's strategy for addressing unemployment now tails the SDLP and the Ulster Unionist Party in looking to American multinational investment. With a worsening international recession, particularly in the high-tech industries which they aim to attract, this strategy could not come at a worse moment. More immediately, the obvious price for such investment, in terms of continued low pay rates and the discouraging of trade union rights, do not figure in Sinn Féin's concerns. Instead, Gerry Adams has joined John Hume and David Trimble in calling for the lowering of business tax rates to compete with the 10 per cent tax rates in the South.

The hope that locally-based government will be more amenable to public pressure on local issues has to be set against a background where a new round of public sector cuts are in the offing. The Blair govern-



Protestors confront John Hume as he prepares to welcome US right-winger Newt Gingrich

ment already has an agenda of downsizing the North's huge public sector and reducing the subsidy to the province. The ending of the troubles has removed a certain political pressure for spending in the interests of promoting stability. Already there are major steps underway to privatise sections of the civil service. The demand by most of the North's parties to cut taxes on business can only add to a further run down of social services.

The connection between the desire to end sectarianism and a redressing of the practical social problems finds no expression in the existing political process. Moreover, the continued dominance of sectarian politics contains a real danger that with a worsening economic situation, the insecurity and despair of working class areas can be taken in a sectarian direction.

The twin crises of loyalism and armed republicanism will keep this at bay for a time. But it adds to the urgency of creating a serious force on the left. What is needed is a set of socialist politics which locates the source of these problems in capitalism and looks to the common interests of working class people as the basis for an alternative to sectarianism. This needs to be built into a socialist organisation which can win Protestant and Catholic workers away from communal loyalties and towards a strategy of working class unity in struggle.

Failed traditions

So far this has not happened because there has been a legacy on the left in Northern Ireland of the two rotten traditions — left-republicanism and labourism.

There is a hidden history of socialist organisation in the North dating back to the forerunners of the Communist Party in the 1920's and 1930's and the Northern Ireland Labour Party in the post-war era, which at various times have attracted the support of hundreds and sometimes thousands of Protestant and Catholic workers. But time and again these organisations have run themselves into dead ends by misjudging the political situation and relying on a mistaken political method. The Communist Party is now a tiny group, rarely seen in public, and the Northern Ireland Labour Party is non-existent despite various recent attempts to revive it. During the last 30 years, however, the same type of mistakes have been made by other organisations.

On the one hand there were small groups of

socialists who have seen themselves as primarily left-wing advisers to the republican movement. This was a tradition that emerged with the now defunct Peoples Democracy. While at the same time those in the labourist tradition claimed to be above sectarian division and concentrated on "bread and butter issues". In reality they often ended up adapting themselves to sectarianism.

People's Democracy grew out of a tradition which believed spontaneous movements of the oppressed contained a greater revolutionary potential than the organised working class. Their analysis portrayed the Protestant working class as a "labour aristocracy", separated from their fellow workers by the benefits they supposedly enjoy as a result of discrimination. It followed that the Catholic working class had to take a vanguard role in the struggle against imperialism. Together with workers in the South, who faced a 'neo-colonial' regime, they would drive out imperialism and glide imperceptibly over to a Workers Republic. Protestant workers were assigned the role of at best passive by-standers and at worse a potential neo-fascist opposition.

Yet even at the high point of the "Protestant state for a Protestant people" the notion of Protestant workers forming a labour aristocracy was a complete myth. Protestant engineering workers in Belfast were at the forefront of the massive strikes of 1919 and 1944. The facile comparison between Protestant workers and South African whites fell down on the simplest point that few workers in East Belfast seemed to employ Catholic servants to clean their swimming pools!

The left-republican analysis completely failed to explain the current crisis of Unionism, which has at its heart the collapse of the illusion of a common interest between Protestant workers and bosses. The dramatic decline in membership of the Orange Order, from an estimated 100,000 in the 1950's to less than 40,000 today, can only be understood against the background of the loss of control of local council housing and the massive decline in traditional industries such as shipbuilding. For a supposed "labour aristocracy", Protestant workers have precious little to show for their loyalty. Young working class Protestant men are now the group least likely to make it to university and the highest rates of failure in the 11 plus are to be found among children in the Shankill Road. Manufacturing employment has declined by 58 per cent since the 1960's. Fewer than 2,000 are now employed in the shipyards, compared to 20,000 in the early 1970's. All of this can,

What is needed is a set of socialist politics which locates the source of these problems in capitalism and looks to the common interests of working class people as the basis for an alternative to sectarianism.

of course, create a breeding ground for sectarian resentment. But there are also different possibilities as was shown when shipyard workers in Belfast walked out on strike in 1993 when Maurice O'Kane, a Catholic, was murdered at Harland and Wolff by the UFF.

The labourist tradition pointed in a different and seemingly more attractive direction. It argued that by concentrating on economic demands it is possible to show working class people that their interests are the same and that they should therefore unite. This rested on an abstract notion of capitalism where Northern Ireland was a state like any other. Sectarianism was explained by the different tribal mentalities rather than being a phenomenon that was necessarily inscribed into the state itself. Focussing mainly on the elections as a vehicle for change, labourism meant an avoidance of any issue that might challenge sectarian ideas held by workers. Most famously, for example, the Northern Ireland Labour Party refused to condemn internment when it was introduced at the start of the troubles.

The labourist tradition was never able to establish a core of committed members that could resist the communal pressures of the last decade. The last attempt to re-found yet another Labour group in Northern Ireland occurred at the time of the Assembly elections. The two representatives who were eventually elected remained virtually silent throughout the debates that followed as they were never able to challenge the institutionalisation of sectarianism that was occurring.

The main remnant of this labour coalition, the Socialist Party, has suffered considerably from this failed experiment. It has now shifted its position to accepting the possibility of a six county socialist state where Catholics and Protestants might re-locate as a means of expressing their 'self determination'. It now promotes the idea that while Catholics are an oppressed national minority in the North, Protestants are an oppressed national minority within Ireland as a whole and therefore are entitled to exert national self-determination.

Once again, this offers nothing to Protestants who are questioning the idea of loyalty to a state which has delivered them nothing. Instead it reflects a pessimism where the divisions in the working class are accepted as permanent.

The revolutionary tradition

The revolutionary socialist tradition points in a different direction. It starts out from the larger picture whereby the present situation facing socialists all over the world is one of growing instability for capitalism and the possibility of major upheavals. The experience of the thirties was that workers can move rapidly to the left — but there is also of course real dangers that extreme right wing forces can also get a grip.

In Northern Ireland today socialists have to rapidly pull together a core of committed revolutionaries through their work in the colleges and the unions. The colleges are important because in a geographically divided society they are one place where Catholics and Protestants mix.

They are also one of the first institutions that experience the crisis of ideas in a system that is more unstable than ever before. But unless this political work is linked to a determined effort to win a base in the organised working class, it is futile.

There are thousands of shop stewards who hold together the labour movement in the North. On a daily basis they experience both the reality of exploitation and the need to keep workers together to resist the employers. Yet this reality finds no expression in the dominant parties who are organised around the promotion of communal division.

A revolutionary strategy therefore places working class struggle at the core of its activity. While electoral work cannot be ruled out, socialists are far more likely to make real gains by winning a base in the unions where their ideas have an immediate rel-

evance. The key now is to win this audience to a strategy of resisting the new attacks that capital will launch. This means advocating workers occupations to resist the growing wave of closures; promoting outright opposition to Blair's policy of privatisation; and adopting a strategy of defying Tory anti-union laws. Joint workers struggle provide the surest ground for the emergence of class politics which many aspire to.

But economic struggles alone can never be sufficient. The organisation of politics on sectarian lines means that a revolutionary party needs to challenge rather than adapt to the dominant ideas in both 'communities'.

In practice this means winning Catholic workers away from an idea that their fate is bound up with a pan-nationalist strategy. The bankruptcy of republicanism means that Adams and McGuinness now have no compunction in aligning themselves with the most reactionary elements in Irish society. Their aim is to use their record of struggle to re-position sections of Irish workers once again around the failed politics of Fianna Fail. Their anti-imperialism is only limited to opposition to Britain — they have no difficulty giving cover to Clinton's more powerful machine. Against the pan-nationalists, socialists argue openly that the best allies of Catholic workers are their fellow Protestant workers.

Similarly, socialists need to mount an open challenge to loyalist ideas rather than accepting them as an inevitable part of 'Protestant culture'. Loyalism rests on the idea that Protestant workers have distinct interests to defend against a lazy, inferior and rebel section of Catholic workers. At a time when huge numbers of British workers are turning their back on the monarchy, it still sees the Queen as a touchstone of a British identity. Against any idea that there is a Protestant community 'under siege' socialists need to argue that the best ally of Protestant workers are their fellow Catholic workers.

Socialists can connect with workers' aspiration for struggle and still challenge the dominant ideas in each community, if they are clear about one thing — that they have no loyalty to any state machine built to oppress and exploit workers. They need to openly and clearly advocate the destruction of both states in Ireland, which produced a 'carnival of reaction', and advocate a workers state where every section of workers gain.

The current situation in the North presents socialists with an unprecedented opportunity to build a serious socialist organisation. There is an enormous vacuum to the left of the established parties, and a deafening silence on the immediate concerns of working class Protestants and Catholics. Whether on the issue of student fees, single parent benefit cuts or the run down in the health service, there are thousands of working class people who want to see a fight back. The initiative of a Charter for Class Politics shows there is a real audience in the workplaces for those who promote alternative policies.

During July and August, Socialist Workers Party members in Belfast and Derry have been approaching trade union activists with a Charter for Class Politics, a general statement about the need for workers to unite against sectarianism and a list of demands for a minimum wage, trade union rights, an end to privatisation and for free education.

Even during the worst of the Drumcree standoff, the response was almost universally supportive. To date over 120 shop stewards from trade unions such as the Fire Brigade Union, UNISON, civil servants and railway workers have publicly endorsed it and agreed to support any group of workers engaged in struggle over these or similar issues.

The potential for solidarity and working class struggle is enormous in the North. Only socialist politics, which is based on an insistence that class is the main division in the North and which looks to the working class as the mechanism of change, offers a means to express it.

The fight against racism



THE WEXFORD People's editorial, the week in which 45 Romanians arrived in that town, claimed that Romanians were waiting at secondary schools hoping to impregnate Irish school girls. It also claimed that Romanians in shanty towns of Le Havre and Cherbourg were waiting for their chance to jump on a ship to Ireland.

These were pathetic lies aimed blatantly at the stirring up of racial hatred. An independent Councillor in Wexford insisted Romanians were jumping the housing queue. An Irish Times article implied Romanians were not political refugees at all, and that some of them were really quite well off. *Ireland on Sunday* joined in the Romanian bashing.

The racism against gypsies from Romania is particularly vicious. These are a people who have suffered horrendous discrimination. They were slaves until the nineteenth century and half a million gypsies were gassed in Nazi concentration camps.

One of the uglier aspects of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe was the institutional racism towards gypsies. In Romania, where about 2 million gypsies live, they are constant victims of police brutality and tortures. In an ironic twist of racism, other Rumania asylum seekers refused to share accommodation with them in Wexford.

Just like the travellers here, it has been the unevenness of economic development that has placed the gypsies on the margins of society. In Eastern Europe that development reached breakneck speed and caused drastic poverty, and Ceausescu was only too happy to use the gypsies as a scapegoat. Official

Why has racism come to the fore? **Marnie Holborow** looks at the history of racism, some of the myths and how to fight it

Stalinist ideology labelled gypsies as backward and that legacy is what they are fleeing.

The Wexford saga is the latest twist to racist ideas peddled in the media. Refugees face insults, are taunted at night and some, like Neol Makoko in Summerhill, were badly beaten by racists in July. There have been at least 18 incidents against refugees reported since April. On the other hand, many people want to stand against racism as the wide support for the Anti Nazi League Carnival at the end August showed.

Where does racism come from?

It is important to recognise where racism starts. Politicians may claim that they are speaking for ordinary people, but it is always the top of society that gets racism underway. Minister for Justice John O'Donohoe has fanned racism by creating the toughest immigration policy. In May, an amnesty for refugees was proposed. O'Donohoe refused claiming it would lead to a flood of refugees. Then, in July, refugee organisations proposed that asylum seekers awaiting their cases to be processed should be allowed to work. O'Donohoe refused again.

He had already removed provisions from the 1996 Refugee Act which promised legal representation, a special mention for those with family members already here and made the time limits shorter. Getting refugee status in Ireland is tough and brutal. And it is getting tougher. Last year 209 applications were approved and 304 refused. This year only 53 out of out of 426 were allowed remain. Last year 120 asylum seekers were allowed to remain here for "humanitarian leave". This year nobody was allowed to remain

on humanitarian grounds. O'Donohoe is now considering the finger printing of all asylum seekers supposedly to thwart false claims. It is a hundred thousand welcomes for capital coming to Ireland, but the shutters down for refugees. Fortress Europe, quite as brutal as France or Britain, has come to Ireland.

Racism is always stirred up, not by ordinary people, but by the ruling class. The French government long before Le Pen's electoral successes suggested laid-off workers in the car factories should be "repatriated", even though many of the North African workers had been in France for years. Even supposed left-wing councils mowed down immigrant hostels in the Communist-run Red Belt around Paris. In Ireland, too, it has been the ruling parties that has led the racist mood. Last year, Ivor Callely, in an attempt to deflect anger from Fianna Fail's corruption, railed against "rogue asylum-seekers" and taxpayers' money being spent on them. Fianna Fail has been quite prepared to be identified the anti-immigration lobby. O'Donohoe only recently said that comparisons between Irish emigration to the US and refugees today are "facile". According to him, "Ireland is just a small island with an open economy". O'Donohoe should have added that the 130,000 illegal immigrants in the US are white. The media ran story after story about refugees being a burden on the state and Gay Byrne, it should be remembered, bent over backwards to say how "courageous" Aine Ni Chonaill was to speak her mind, when she first appeared on television. This approach from the establishment has put racism higher on the agenda.

Racism and capitalism go together. Throughout history it has been used by those who profit from the system. To cover over the brutality of slavery, the superiority of the white "race" was invented to justify the slave traders. In the Triangular Trade between the West Coast of Africa, the New World and Britain, the rising capitalist class made extensive use of slave labour, exchanging humans for manufactured products. While extolling the freedom of the individual, it reinforced servile labour systems throughout the world. John Locke, the philosopher, was a senior administrator of slave owning colonies in the New world and argued that slavery was justifiable. David Hume, another philosopher, held that black people were "naturally inferior" to whites. Racism, as Eric Williams pointed out in his classic *Capitalism and Slavery*, developed for the crudest economic reasons.

Under the British Empire racism became the accepted ideology. T. H. Huxley one of the nineteenth century's most respected scientists, wrote in 1865 that "it was simply incredible" that the black man could "compete successfully" with his bigger-brained and smaller jawed white rival "in a contest which is to be carried on by thoughts and not by bites". Racism became the ideological justification to rob and rule the empire.

"What is Empire" asked Lord Rosebery in 1900 "but the predominance of race?"

Marx in his writings on India mocked the callous British "civilisation-mongers" for their profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism which lay unveiled in the colonies.

In this century, too, capitalism and racism are closely intertwined, something that many forget. In Britain when economic crisis loomed in the late 60's, the same Afro-Caribbeans and Asians which had been enthusiastically recruited to work in British factories, were scapegoated at the first signs of economic crisis. Enoch Powell used the same language as Aine Ni Chonaill today - Britain was being "swamped", and he was only "speaking up for what people think". Capitalism fans racism because it seeks the greatest exploitation of the working class and whipping up divisions between workers can break down class solidarity.

Racism is used to set worker against worker. It is not just a vile ideology but one which by weakening workers links together, is a useful political weapon for the ruling class to maintain its position. Marx remarked about anti-Irish racism in nineteenth century Liverpool, that racism not only targeted the wrong enemy but it was also against the interests of British workers, for it

weakened their ability to fight back. If British workers did not resist anti-Irish racism Marx argued they "would remain tied to the leading-strings of the ruling classes". The same applies today. While Fianna Fail politicians whip up hatred against refugees they hope to draw Irish people together so that the class that they represent is let off the hook.

Is racism inevitable?

The reason that racism finds an echo is because of the rotten conditions that workers experience under capitalism. Racism is not an attitude, or basic natural awareness of difference deep down within all of us, as some have argued. It has material roots. It can catch on because it is a distorted reflection of competition amongst workers to sell their labour power. The frustration of the dole queue, the constant fear of having benefits docked, of not being able to pay the bills, the scarcity and expense of decent housing, are the seed-bed of racist ideas.

But this does not mean racism is inevitable. The right-wing wants to present it as inevitable because it accepts poverty. But there is a left-wing version of the inevitability of racism as well. Pat Guerin of the Anti Racism Campaign said recently that racial tension is the inevitable result of asylum seekers being housed in areas where there is already considerable social and economic deprivation. This bolsters the idea that there are only a certain amount of funds available for working class areas and nothing can be done about it. It also sees workers in a mechanically economic way that completely underestimates their political ability to stand up for their overall interests as workers.

Of course, racism always hits working class areas directly because refugees aren't put in Foxrock. But the argument that racism is inevitable in working class areas is absurd. Following that logic the Stephen Lawrence campaign should give up campaigning in the working class estates of South East London and the immigrant Sans Papiers campaign in France might as well forget about the working class flats in North Paris.

Political arguments and political campaigns make all the difference as to whether racism takes hold. Socialist ideas about black and white workers fighting together against the racist system can turn the mood around.

At first, in Britain in the late 60's, dockers marched in support of Powell. The fact that they did reflected their own fear for jobs and standard of living and their own inability to fight back. But, by the mid seventies, when workers struggles and a strong anti-fascist campaign had intervened, the dockers had changed their tune. They backed the 1977 Anti Nazi League carnival and, with greater political confidence understood that a blow against immigrants is a political blow against everyone. In France, too, the seemingly unstoppable rise of Le Pen was punctured by rising workers struggles in the mid 1990s and people began to be won towards anti-racist mobilisations. In other words racism is not endemic amongst workers. It depends on political confidence to take it on.

Reformist politics accepts that racism is innate in the working class and this is why they have such a bad record on anti-racism. Because their politics is about sharing out the crumbs on a local basis, getting the best deal for one area against another, they actually play into the idea that we can only "afford" so many refugees. Time and time again arguments about limiting numbers of immigrants, about distinctions between economic and political refugees become smoke screens for soft racism and an excuse to pander to electoralism. In France, in Germany, and in Britain, Labour Parties have always given ground to the racists. The Labour Government's restrictions on the entry of Asians from East Africa in the late 60's opened the way for Enoch Powell. In Germany in 1993 an Asylum Bill restricted entry of refugees and three days later a Turkish immigrant hotel was burnt down in Solingen with five immigrants murdered. Divisive arguments that we can only afford so many plays off

one refugee against another "less deserving", an Irish worker against a foreigner, when in fact all Irish workers, including refugees, have an interest standing together and fighting together for better jobs and services. That is why the slogan "Refugees are welcome here" is so important.

Is racism like fascism?

Because Europe has seen the rise of fascist parties some have argued that it is inevitable too that Ireland will see fascism grow. This pessimism fails to understand that fascism emerges under specific circumstances and can be stopped.

In Ireland at present we do not have organised fascists. People like Aine Ni Chonaill and her Immigration Controls Platform is a racist that is latching on to right-wing populist ideas, so far not very effectively.

It is important however to understand that racism is not the same as fascism. Racist ideas are pushed by the top of society when they want to deflect from their own inability to provide what people need. Racist ideas exist at different levels in society, where capitalism divides people, but can be challenged by workers fighting back and challenging racism.

Fascism has a different political character. Trotsky writing of the Nazis in Germany in 1931, spelled out plainly what fascism was. Firstly, it was not just another type of capitalist rule nor was it just a reactionary right wing movement. Fascism means "first of all the extermination of the ...proletariat, the destruction of its organisations, the eradication of its belief in itself and in its future". It smashes the bourgeois democracy as we know it. The Nazis banned Marx but they also banned Darwin; they suppressed left wing parties but also trade unions; even community organisations like the boy scouts were also crushed.

Secondly, fascism was not just dictatorship from above, a police state. It was a counter-revolution from below. It had the support from sections of the capitalist class who sought to protect their profits against working class militancy in times of crisis. But its social base was the petty bourgeoisie which fascism bound together as a political force through appealing to its traditional hatred of both the workers' movement and big capital.

As Trotsky wrote "Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralised lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy". Fascism's main support and shock troops both in Germany and Italy came not from within the working class but from the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie. This is important since those who have argued that fascism is a working class phenomenon have been pessimistic about winning workers to fight it.

Lessons from history

There have been different traditions of fighting racism. The liberal approach has been that racism is about educating people. Because they do not have a class view of society, they believe that racism is just a misinformed attitude that stems from ignorance. This view fails to understand that racism is rife amongst the most educated.

A society in Trinity College invited the fascist David Irving to speak in the 1980's.

It was the upper classes in Britain in the 1930's, like the Milfords, that idolised Hitler. Anti-semitism was rife in the upper echelons of the French army as the Dreyfus Affair at the beginning of this century showed. More recently in Paris it was the well-heeled Law Faculty in Paris was the base of the racist Action Francaise.

Liberals often believe that education is the answer. Everyone would like to see more education about different cultures in our schools. But education on its own can only do so much. It is conditions of poverty and competition in the working class, not abstract concepts, that give racist ideas a hold.

Other people argue that racists cannot change and therefore only committed anti-racists can fight racism. They argue that compromised reformists can never sincerely fight racists and that they should not be part of anti-racist campaigns. To invite them to take part would only give them credibility. Likewise, it is said that reforms that they suggest, such as amnesty for refugees, are simply clever tactics that we cannot trust.

The German socialist Rosa Luxemburg once argued that revolutionaries are the best reformists. By this she meant that socialists fight the hardest for reforms because they understand that winning reforms can win confidence for the working class to go further. The granting of an Amnesty, however unsatisfactory for future refugees coming to Ireland, would nevertheless have represented a small victory against the racists, made a difference to asylum seekers awaiting the outcome of the applications and made for a better political climate.

But also it is important to remember that many workers look to reformist parties like the Labour Party and, to a lesser extent, Democratic Left. Getting the leaders of these parties to support anti-racist demands can bring in larger groups of workers in the fight against racism. Trotsky understood the value of socialists working alongside wider layers of workers. He argued that refusing to work alongside everyone who opposed fascism was purist and ultra left. Doing this left the mass of workers on the sidelines and open to the ideas of racism. Mass working class action was the key to stopping the fascists. Revolutionaries on their own could never defeat fascism.

Trotsky called this approach of involving the largest amount of people around specific anti-fascist activities the tactic of the United Front. Socialists had to work alongside workers who may be reformists, or anything else, and look for joint action with them. This did not mean dissolving into the anti-fascist movement nor obscuring the fundamental differences between revolutionaries and reformists. "Strike together, march separately was how" Trotsky put it.

His argument for the United Front is relevant for today, in many areas where socialists are active, but particularly in the building of a general political climate of anti-racism.

Elsewhere in Europe the left has often failed to build this unity in action. The growth of the fascists in Italy was due to the failure of those committed anti-fascists on the left to understand the need to build the broadest movement against the fascists.

By contrast, the ANL in Britain in the 1970's understood the importance of this. It successfully involved large numbers of workers, pushed back the Nazis vote and won a considerably larger audience for revolution-

ary socialist ideas.

The other way people have opposed racism is to believe that it is a question of going after the individual racist. It is sometimes argued, often in left-sounding phrases, that, even in Ireland, individual nazis must be got through commando-style tactics. Again lessons from history are instructive.

The German Communist Party (KPD) in the early thirties polled four and a half million votes and had a massive membership of 360,000. The German Labour Party, the SPD, was also bigger than the Nazis. The tactics of the Communists were sectarian and left the door open to the nazis. They refused to fight alongside the Labour Party because they thought they were too right wing. *Antifa* (Anti-Fascist Action), was launched by the KPD on its own to fight the rise of Hitler. Not having the mass numbers, *Antifa* prioritised street confrontations above all else. "Smite the fascists wherever you meet them" was the slogan. Without mass mobilisation, this degenerated into squadist attacks that remained isolated from workers action and ineffective.

In spite of wide support that the communists had in the factories, street fighting had become a substitute for wider action. While the young "hardmen" of the KPD glorified their physical confrontation, the real force that could have defeated Hitler, the organised working class, became sidelined.

We have seen some of these type of tactics emerge in Germany and Italy. If one fascist is got another will always take his place. Fighting racism is not about rooting out racists but about building an effective anti-racist movement through mobilisation. That way a political climate can be built that stops racism taking hold. Whether we are fighting racism or any possible fascist organisation that may emerge in Ireland, we have to understand that it is mass mobilisation that will push back the racists and that the arguments against the racists have to be raised in the wider working class.

Socialist politics

At the moment as various meetings and campaigning stalls around Ireland have shown, the arguments about uniting against racism make sense to people. In workplaces people can be won to opposing the racism in the government and the media. The fact that so many banners from trade unions and workplaces sponsored the ANL Carnival indicated that workers are not swallowing the racist arguments. The links with the organised working class are important in giving the backbone to a genuine anti-racist movement.

Many people are outraged at the racism that is being put across on the media. They see it as an ugly side of the Celtic Tiger and one which they want to fight against. But no-one can afford to see the fight against racism too narrowly. John O'Donohoe understands the usefulness for his politics of the racist card and we need to respond to his opportunism on all fronts.

To unite workers in defence of services in local areas, for better provision of housing, for better social security for better organised union jobs, can show that workers' self-activity is the best way in practice of building anti-racism. For when workers feel confident the racist argument cut little ice. To play a part in such struggles means politics that go beyond racism. It requires a struggle against the divisive system itself.

Racism and capitalism go together. Throughout history it has been used by those who profit from the system. To cover over the brutality of slavery, the superiority of the white "race" was invented to justify the slave traders.

A Theatre to Change the World

BERTOLD BRECHT, the communist German playwright who was born 100 years ago this year, left an uncomfortable legacy for the theatre establishment. He trusted working class audiences to enjoy political theatre and to learn from it, unlike most of today's playwrights. And he was proven right - so much so that today's critics have to admit a communist was one of the major influences on European theatre this century.

Brecht's theatre was born out of Germany's class struggle and the crisis of capitalism in the 1920s. His plays dealt with war and crashing stockmarkets, unheard of subjects in mainstream theatre at that time. He had witnessed the first world war and wanted to show how capitalism shaped and destroyed people's lives. Many in his audiences loathed the barbaric logic of capitalism but no playwright had ever explained the system so clearly.

When Germany was on the brink of revolution after the first world war, Brecht's plays voiced the anger of the thousands of soldiers who returned with a hatred of their rulers and the guns in their hands. They came back to a massive working class movement which was crushed only because it lacked a strong revolutionary leadership.

Brecht slated the Weimar Republic's SPD (Labour Party) MPs who were selling out the workers who had voted for them. And once the Nazis came to power in 1933 he dedicated all his theatrical resources to the fight against fascism with plays like *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and *The Round Heads* and the *Pointed Heads*.

"Old theatre"

All these plays are as relevant today as then, with capitalism lurching from recession to crisis and the threat of fascism around us. But on top of that, Brecht revolutionised theatre itself by commenting on the capitalist system through 'ordinary' social incidents.

He consciously broke from 'old theatre', knowing that this bourgeois form of entertainment no longer fitted a society racked by class struggle. Conventional plays tried, in vain, to reinforce ruling class ideas at a time of ruling class crisis. It was obsessed with individuals because bourgeois capitalism had been based on individual enterprise.

But 1920s capitalism had moved on and Brecht knew that theatre had to change with it. Theatre about personalities and love affairs had "outlived its usefulness," he said.

"Old theatre" could no longer "present on the stage the great themes of our times; as, for example, the building-up of a mammoth industry, the conflict of classes, war, the fight against disease, and so on."

Yet Brecht, who had started reading *Das Kapital* in 1926, wanted to show that people could stand up to capitalism and war. "People have worked to find out how man can improve his condition, and today we know that he cannot do this purely privately," he said. "It's only by banding together and joining forces that he stands a chance. Once I take that into consideration my plays are forced to deal with political matters."

Brecht set out to expose the hidden relationships under capitalism - that business supported the Nazis, that the bosses committed daylight robbery on their workers. "When something seems 'the most obvious thing in the world' it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up," he argued.



On the centenary of the birth of one of the world's greatest dramatists. Jenny Witt looks at the life of Bertold Brecht

The spectator was no longer allowed to empathise with a character. Personalities were less important than the vast social forces wrecking workers' lives. So Brecht did away with all elements of theatrical illusion. The actors remained detached from the characters rather than imitating them to perfection.

Narrators described and commented on the plot behind them. They helped the spectator to form an opinion on events. The narrator also often gave the moral of the story: in the case of *Arturo Ui*, about the rise of Hitler, it was "the womb is still fertile from which that crawled".

Stage projections and choruses contributed other, previously unknown, facts. These 'instructional' elements, said Brecht, "broke up the flow of the play and its incidents ... they acted as a cold douche for those whose sympathies were becoming involved."

This was Brecht's famous alienation effect. "The alienation that is necessary to all understanding" could only be achieved by getting the audience to take a step back from the action. "Right and wrong courses of action were shown. The theatre became an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but also to change it."

Brecht knew that this form of theatre was organically linked to the class struggle. It could only take place where a powerful movement in society "is interested to see vital questions freely aired with a view to their solution and can defend this interest against every contrary trend," he explained.

Clearly, these plays had very different effects on bourgeois spectators and working class audiences. Brecht aimed his play at those who were waiting their turn, who were discontented and had a real, material interest in understanding the nature of capitalism. His productions "split the audience into at least two mutually hostile social groups ... Enjoyment of learning depends on the class situation."

Throughout the Weimar Republic, Brecht staged incredibly political plays. *Drums in the Night*, about war and revolution, was one of the most popular plays in 1922. Others were gagged by the ruling Labour/right wing coalition, such as *St Joan of the Stockyards* which describes a young woman's transformation from a charity worker to someone who understands that the bosses are behind human misery. The government ruled that it could only be heard as a radio play while *The Mother*, about Russia's 1905 revolution, could only be read out, not enacted, on stage - in front of an invited audience.

"Theatrical Chaos"

Starting with *Drums in the Night*, Brecht and his stage designer, Piscator - who, like many of Brecht's collaborators, was a member of Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacist movement - adapted the stage to Brecht's 'new theatre'.

Piscator relished the electrification of the stage and "began by causing complete theatrical chaos," as Brecht put it. Treadmills brought characters on and off-stage to stand on planes moving up and down. "Or he would hoist his actors up and down in space," Brecht described. "Now and again they would break a leg, but we were patient with them ..."

"It was the stage's ambition to supply images, statistics, slogans which would enable its parliament, the audience, to reach political decisions ... to squeeze from [the spectator] a practical decision to intervene actively in life." The stage changed beyond recognition: "Away with painted scenery if a film could be shown that had been taken on the spot and ad the stamp of documentary realism. Up with painted cartoons, if the artist had something to say to the parliamentary audience."

One such artist was George Grosz. He too was a Spartacist - he said the German revolution was "as though someone had opened a door and let the light in" - and his crass, almost offputting, cartoons fitted the bill perfectly. They mingled with screens giving unemployment figures or announcing the Wall Street collapse.

Lighting sources were taken from their hidden locations and placed in the spectator's field of vision to leave no room for illusion. Piscator liked to illuminate the auditorium to make people observe their neighbours' reactions and, in turn, be observed.

His poetry, too, rebelled against old conventions. The Nazis duly branded his rhymeless verses with irregular rhythms 'degenerate art'. Brecht explained the effect of the technique in this poem:

"After those drumbeats, the swamp gulping Weapons and horses, all turns in my mother's son's head. Stop panting! Are all Drowned and dead, leaving just noise Hanging on the air? I will not Run further."

"This gave the jerky breath of a man running," he said. "It was a matter not just of formally 'kicking against the pricks' - of a protest against the smoothness and harmony of conventional poetry - but already of an attempt to show human dealings as contradictory, fiercely fought over, full of violence." The inspiration for his irregular rhythms had come from the choruses shouted at a workers' demonstration on Christmas Eve.

Fascism

The Nazis came to power on 28 February 1933. Brecht did what so many others did: he left for voluntary exile in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia (briefly) and later America. From abroad, he watched the full horror of the Third Reich unfold. The fight against fascism became the only thing that mattered in his work.

Brecht insisted that "the struggle against the 'barbarism' of fascism could only be successful if it were also a struggle against the capitalist system in which it was

rooted."

His plays became vitriolic attacks on Hitler and Nazi ideology. *The Round Heads* and the *Pointed Heads* argued that the Nazis used racism to hide the real rift in society, that between exploiters and the exploited. *Senor Carrar's Rifles* set out to drum up support for the anti-fascist fight in Spain.

And *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, written during Brecht's American exile in the form of a 'gangster America' tale, exposed big business' active support for Hitler on his road to power. The US administration was not impressed: Brecht was hauled before the Committee on Un-American Activity in 1947. Fed up, he decided to return to Europe and after a short stint in Switzerland he was offered a theatre of his own in East Berlin, the capital of the newly-formed Stalinist GDR.

Form and politics

Stalin's socialist realist artists had tried to claim Brecht as one of their own during the war years. Yet Brecht's theatre had been labelled 'formalistic' and had actually disappeared from Russia between the 1920s and the 1950s. It only re-emerged when Brecht settled in the GDR and even then the authorities sometimes took a dim view of his plays.

Brecht spent the rest of his life in the GDR and there is no doubt that he had great illusions in Russia's political system. But he was suspicious towards certain elements of the regime. In the 1930s, shortly before the show trials of Stalin's opponents, he had written: "To see what the Cheka [Stalin's secret police] could turn into you only have to look at the Gestapo."

And in 1953, when the GDR's workers rebelled against the government, Brecht wrote a letter to the papers, urging Ulbricht, the head of state, to discuss the workers' demands. It was edited down until it had lost all its original meaning and appeared to show unqualified support for the government instead. After that Brecht never openly criticised the GDR's or the Russian regime, arguing that this would simply play into the hands of the Western propaganda machinery.

Often he explicitly supported Stalin, especially around the show trials denouncing Trotsky and the last surviving Bolsheviks. And in his *Me-ti*, a parable on Stalin's Russia, Brecht clearly sides with Stalin's policy of socialism in one country.

"To-tsi [Trotsky] declared the construction of order in one country impossible. Ni-en [Stalin] went ahead and constructed it ... To-tsi envisaged an overthrow in all the countries and afterwards construction in all countries. Ni-en began the construction in his country and knew it would topple other countries."

But again the *Me-ti* reveals glimpses of Brecht's discontent. His critique of Russia's East European 'satellite states' goes straight to the heart of Stalinism: "The members didn't elect the secretaries but the secretaries elected the members. The slogans were dictated by Su and the secretaries were paid by Su. When mistakes were made, those who had criticised them were punished but those who had committed them remained in their posts."

By the mid-1950s his work journals also showed some disillusionment. "In Russia there is a dictatorship over the proletariat," he wrote. And: "They already suspect you if Stalin's name fails to feature in a poem."

Like so many socialists east and west Brecht could not see an alternative to Stalinism. In the absence of such an alternative he backed a regime that millions of Communist Party-influenced workers in the West regarded as better than Western capitalism. And of course any open criticism of Stalin would have endangered Brecht's work in the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in East Berlin.

But until his death in 1956 Brecht remained a playwright who struck at the heart of capitalism. As the tide of socialist revolution washed over Germany he brought workers into plush auditoriums to arm them with an understanding of capitalism and how to fight it. Brecht's legacy has been borrowed by today's arts establishment - but it is ours, to be reclaimed when workers fill the Abbey's corporate boxes once again.

REVIEWS

Lifelines: Biology, Freedom, Determinism.

Steven Rose. Published by Allen Lane. The Penguin Press. £20

THIS IS an important book, not just for biologists and researchers, but for everyone who is concerned with how we and future generations view the world. It is difficult to do justice to a book that manages to combine a new vision of how the world works with



a review of the history and development of modern biology, and a critique of the current scientific literature. It also includes a layman's interpretation of scientific terms that demystifies many of the recent genetic theories and explains the social and financial environment in which decisions about who will investigate what, are made. This has the effect of making the debate about how science views the world accessible to the general public.

One of the main points made in this book is that it is necessary to understand the bias of the person making a statement before one can properly interpret it. Therefore, I should state from the outset that my position is that of a biological psychiatrist who finds the current reductionist trend in life sciences deeply worrying, both from a scientific and a political point of view. The problem can be that, while one is aware there is something very wrong with the reasoning behind such statements as that aggression, antisocial behaviour or homosexuality are caused by abnormalities in the brain, it is difficult to pinpoint the faults in the reasoning and still engage with it sufficiently to argue effectively. If one is looking for a clear and comprehensive critique of such statements then one could not do better than read Chapter 10 of this book, called appropriately "The poverty of reductionism".

This is a book about chickens and eggs. As stated in the beginning to chapter 9, it is about "whether a chicken is an egg's way of making another egg or whether an egg is a chicken's way of making another chicken". Steven Rose's describes this book as his attempt to restate the chicken's case against the current wave of biological determinism. In his previous books, *The Making of Memory* and *Not in the Genes*, he has concentrated on rebuffing the arguments of the opposing camp but with this one, he takes the discussion a stage further and gives his "vision of living systems, living process—indeed life itself—from the perspective of modern biology". He heavily criti-

cises the "beanbag" thinking of some of the scientific community that denies the importance of the interaction between environment and genetics. He investigates a dialectical theory, proposed by the Russian scientist Operin, that the present day atmosphere of the earth evolved as a by-product of emerging life. He discusses why there cannot be a gene "for" behavioural traits such as aggression and antisocial behaviour and indicates the dubious origins of such thinking.

Rose repeatedly refers to the need to understand the context in which we investigate biology.

Much of the early part of the book concerns itself with the different ways in which different schools of scientists think about the world and he explains how it was that the physicist's view that the simplest answer is the best, came to dominate the biological sciences. He explains that, in order to examine the complex living world, it has been necessary to design experiments that are reductionist in nature. Without in any way demeaning the importance of the information gained from such work, Rose questions the universal applicability of such a perspective and tries to develop an approach that, instead of claiming the superiority of one explanation over another, view them as different languages and sees the interaction between these viewpoints as similar to translation. It is interesting that, while performing this considerable feat, he also produces a very readable layman's version of some of the more abstruse terms in common currency in scientific circles.

He dismisses any notion that there is such a thing as neutral observations. The answers given and the type of explanations used tend to depend on our reasons for asking the question. With this in mind, he examines the history of biology and looks at the old and new far-right thinking that pervades many of the best known research in the world, including the Human Genome Project. He rightly points out the far-reaching social consequences of deciding that much of our behaviour is decided by our genetic inheritance. It tends to "blame the victim" while reducing personal responsibility for antisocial acts. He quotes Tony Mobley, a convicted murderer, who claimed "It was not me it was my genes". Another consequence is that it tends to divert funding and attention from the social to the genetic.

When the violent crime rate is increasing in the USA and the alienated and marginalised abuse alcohol and other substances, the response, under this ethos, is to fund research into the genetics of alcoholism and "violent temperaments" instead of addressing the underlying socio-economic problems or legislating to reduce the number of handguns in American society. These are not scientific Ivory Tower considerations but have practical implications for everybody.

In the last chapter, Rose introduces ten theses, which he calls biology's

decatalogue. These include: Our history shapes our knowledge; There are many ways of knowing the world and many different levels of organisation and everything depends on your point of view; Living organisms exist in four dimensions, the three of space and one of time and cannot be read off for the single dimension that constitutes the strand of DNA; Organisms are open systems and every molecule, organelle, cell is in a constant state of flux; Organisms are also in constant interaction with their environment and, like organisms, environments evolve; there are physical and chemical constraints on the structural possibilities available through evolution; The past is the key to the present and life constructs its own future. His last statement, somewhat tongue in cheek, is that the future for everyone is not pre-planned by our genes but is radically unpredictable. "This means that we have the ability to construct our own future, albeit in circumstances not of our own choosing. And it is therefore our biology that makes us free."

For most of its length, the book is written in simple prose, Rose explains what he intends to show and then goes on to demonstrate his points in straightforward steps. In this manner he covers some of the most complex arguments in the scientific world today in a down-to-earth manner without at any stage speaking down to his reader. There were times when I felt that some of the more involved sections of the book would lose the interest, if not the understanding, of the general reader but this occurred seldom. I heartily recommend it.

Helen Keely

Dialectically Speaking

The Algebra of Revolution: the Dialectic and the Classical Marxist tradition by John Rees. Routledge 1998 £11

JOHN REES' new book, *The Algebra of Revolution* is a vindication of the dialectic as the Marxist method. Taking its title from the phrase coined by the nineteenth century Russian radical Alexander Herzen, Rees' book emphasises the dialectic as a tool, essential for understanding the nature of society.

The subject of the dialectic arouses considerable controversy among Marxists. Many within the Marxist tradition have claimed that the dialectic is incompatible with a scientific view of the world. It is said to be obscure, irrelevant, misleading and that its link to mystical German philosophy has no place within a scientific world view.

Properly understood, the dialectic is indispensable for understanding the world we live in and an essential method in political practice. It points to how revolutionary transformation in society can come about.

The starting point for understanding

the dialectic is our own everyday experience. How do people living in a capitalist society experience the world?

Essentially we experience it as chaotic, fragmented, a meaningless mess of unrelated events. If we take the news for example. What we see every evening is a series of reports about different events—events that those controlling the programme happen to think are important. These events are presented in a way which suggests there is no connection between them. Their only relationship is random, they are all segments on the same news programme.

Yet the world is not a mass of randomly related events. This is Rees' starting point. He begins by outlining the contradictions that are inherent to capitalism today and how the dialectic offers a way of understanding these contradictions.

Rees then takes us through the history of the development of the dialectic from Hegel, how it was transformed by Marx and Engels, how it was interpreted mechanically in the Second International. He looks at how Lenin grasped the implications of the dialectic for revolutionary organisation and what Trotsky wrote on the dialectic.

Rees shows very well how Marx both built on but also criticised the Hegelian dialectic. For Hegel the dialectic was based on the idea that things are in themselves contradictory and that it is these contradictions that moves things forward. But he saw this operating just at the level of ideas. Marx put Hegel back on his feet because he freed Hegel's dialectic from its idealist framework.

Contradictions are not just opposing ideas. They are primarily social contradictions in the conflict between the forces and relations of production and the between classes. It is this struggle of opposing forces that is the driving force of social transformation.

It is sometimes claimed that if you accept the Marxist dialectic all you need do is to sit back and wait for revolution. Rees is careful to show that the real Marxist dialectic is neither deterministic nor fatalistic. Hegel thought view that the historical process is implicit from the start. But Marx disagreed. The materialist dialectic of Marx offers no guarantee of ultimate success. The future of capitalist society, and of humanity, depends on the outcome of class struggle which can never be predetermined.

There is also a chapter on Georg Lukacs, the Hungarian socialist, who wrote about the theory of the novel as well as general Marxism. Rees presents a strong defence of Lukacs' *History and Class Consciousness* arguing convincingly against Lukacs' critics who have accused him of relativism and of denying the existence of the dialectic in nature.

Rees also offers a brief but comprehensive rebuttal of recent anti-dialecticians like Althusser, Foucault, postmodernists and others. Rees seems to manage to explain these complex ideas quite simply and accessibly. He avoids using metaphors about acorns and oaks and boiling kettles that others writing about this subject always seem to mis-use and which are often too abstract to be helpful.

Rees concludes this wonderful book by reminding us that the dialectic is not just about theory but also practice. For all the great classical Marxists, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, the revolutionary potential of the

working class was always linked—dialectically—to the building of a revolutionary party.

This book is nothing less than essential reading for all revolutionaries.

Sinead Kennedy

Old fire, new sparks

The Fire the Last Time by Chris Harman. Bookmarks £11

RUARI QUINN and Liz McManus, asked to give their ideas on 1968, believed that the events thirty years ago represented a sort of adolescent revolt against fuddy-duddy ideas. From the US to Ireland, the image presented is often one of students smoking pot who rebelled against their parents but eventually grew up and, as in the case of Labour and DL, gave up all that revolutionary nonsense and became part of the establishment.

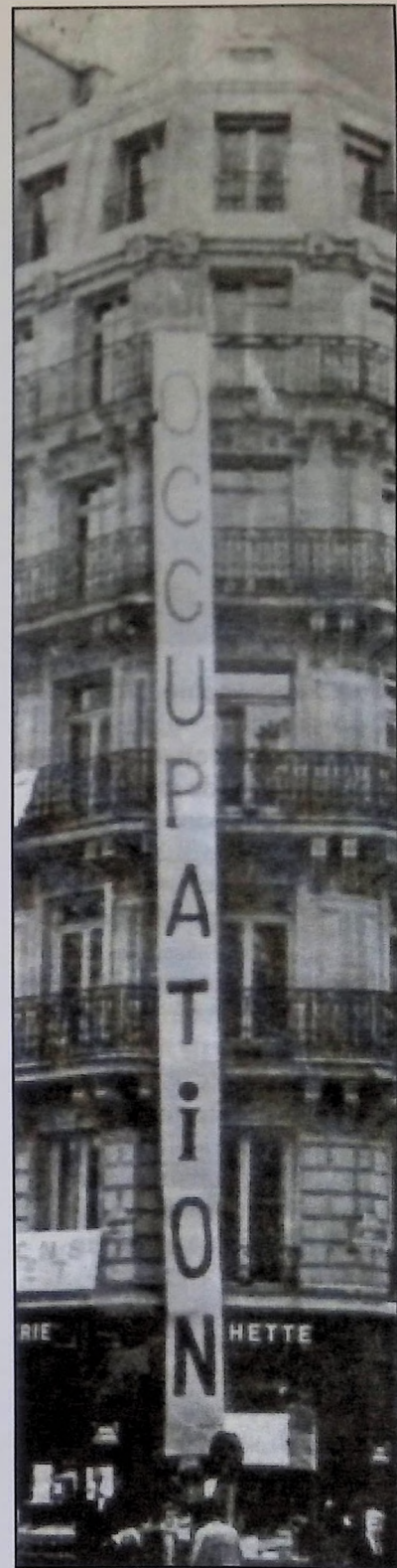
This version of 1968 should not surprise us. It is in the interests of our rulers to make safe the memories of revolts in the past, in case people should use their inspiration to challenge the system in the future. Chris Harman's, *The Fire the Last Time—1968 and After* sets out to challenge the view that 68 was simply a student revolt. He shows that 1968 was part of a massive world wide class struggle that lasted from the mid sixties until 1974. It shook the very foundations of some of the most advanced capitalist nations in the world.

Students were, of course, centrally involved in the struggles in Paris, Berlin, London, Prague, Milan, Northern Ireland and the US. But where workers entered the fray, the struggles reached their greatest height and shook governments to the core.

In Paris, the revolts began with the student demonstrations against the Vietnam war and student conditions. These were met with violence by the riot police leading to street fighting and barricades being thrown up in the Latin Quarter. Workers saw these scenes on TV and, already frustrated by the effects of a wage freeze, came out in their thousands to protest at police brutality and repression. Their intervention was decisive. Pressure from workers forced the trade unions to call a one day general strike on May 13th. Within a few days, factories had been occupied; within two weeks ten million workers were on strike in what was to become the biggest general strike in history.

The leaders of the Communist Party dominated trade unions were desperate to prevent the movement going too far. The CP wanted only to use the movement as means to get some say in government. In early June the government offered workers a major pay increase and called a general election.

The trade union leaders moved to call the strike off. Although many workers wanted to fight on they had no organisation capable of challenging the CP influence on the shop floor. It was at this point that student radicalism on its own reached its limits. Student leaders, believing the struggles had to be spontaneous and rejecting the need for organisations, underestimated the way in which reformism could control the



movement.

As the strikes wound down, no one was in a position to challenge the sell-outs of the union leaders. Soon the mass of students themselves quickly began to drift back to classes aware that the old order was going to be restored.

Despite the set-back in France, the wave of revolt and radicalisation continued for the next six years. 1969 saw a long hot autumn of strikes and factory occupations in Italy. In the US, mass protests against the Vietnam war coincided with the fight against racism. The Black Panthers, who openly called for the revolutionary overthrow of society, became an inspiration for many. The struggle for civil rights in the North of Ireland flashed scenes across the world of demonstrators being bludgeoned for just marching. Hundreds and thousands of students and working class people fought against the sectarian Orange state. In 1974 in Portugal a revolution overthrew the fascist dictatorship. Despite high levels of workers struggles, without a concerted revolutionary alternative being put, the old reformists managed to step into the breach. It was this that steered these struggles back from revolutionary change.

The strength of Harman's book, however, is to show that socialist revolution was possible. He shows how revolutionary upsurges don't come in trickles, they come in waves. 1968 stretched from Argentina to Czechoslovakia. The international link triggered off from a tiny country in South East Asia brought jitters to the heart of the US ruling class. More than that he shows that the underlying crisis of capitalism that gave rise to those struggles will also ensure that revolts on that scale and bigger will happen again. In recent strikes in France, in Denmark and in Indonesia today we have seen how workers and students in the 1990's can begin to challenge our rulers' attempts to ride the crisis of capitalism. As those sparks flare, the lessons of 1968 ring true today. This time around we must have a revolutionary organisation that looks to the working class and is big enough to challenge union leaders and reformist politicians.

Richard Boyd Barrett

End in Tears

The Lie of the Land: Irish Identities by Fintan O Toole Verso £9.99

THE AIM of this collection of articles and essays by one of Ireland's most prominent liberal journalists is, O'Toole explains, "to describe what it feels like to be Irish in the 1990's".

The book deals with the changes which have taken place in Irish culture and attitudes under the influence of emigration. It describes how institutions such as the catholic church, the State and family, the one-time constants of Irish life, have been entirely discredited.

O'Toole tries to find from the experience of change something which can define the "New Ireland".

The first essay looks at the effect emigration has had on Irish people.

He shows well how the emigrants of the 19th century faced poor pay and discrimination and how they played a vital part in

the expansion of the United States but ramble aimlessly from one film to another novel without any seeming direction. O'Toole's perfect image of the Irish in America is of them being "both Indian and Indian killer".

It is only when we get to the writings on the cracking of the two great Irish monoliths, the Church and Fianna Fail, that O'Toole's fine style is put to real effect. His description of the hypocrisy of such figures as Bishop Eamonn Casey (it is well to remember now), Fr Michael Cleary and Charlie Haughey is scathing. He describes the rise of the church throughout the 19th century as one of the few sources of a social service. Also in the years after independence the Church in effect was social welfare in all but name. O'Toole catalogues the demise of the Church in the 1990's, its shattering scandals and the hypocrisy of its most public faces.

Toole covers the Beef Tribunal. Haughey as a man "almost wept when taking of his devotions to the institutions of the state and then thought little of treating the Tribunal of enquiry established by both houses with contempt. This analysis hits the mark but this is as far as O'Toole goes.

For someone like me who has grown up in the period of change which was the 1990s O'Toole's book is a nice trip down memory lane of the past few years. But the O'Toole falls short of offering a path forward for those who want to ensure the likes of Haughey ever assume power again. He fails to connect the various strands of opinion he puts forward. He just doesn't cut to the chase about parliamentary politics nor the dynamic behind it. In fact O'Toole only once mentions the word "capitalism" in this book and that was in a quote. In conclusion, *The Lie of the Land* has brilliant but flowery writing with no serious point but the obvious.

Denis Redfern

Revising Downwards

Ernie O'Malley: IRA Intellectual by Richard English. Oxford University Press £25

ON THE occasion of his state funeral in Dublin in 1957, Ernie O'Malley was described by the Irish Times as a "living legend". A new biography of a significant republican leader, military activist and intellectual should be something to be something to be welcomed. Unfortunately, Richard English does not meet this expectation in his new biography.

Growing up in a middle-class household, O'Malley was radicalised by the experience of the Easter Rebellion. He went on to become an IRA volunteer and organiser responsible to GHQ. He ended the Anglo-Irish War as Commander of the Army's 2ND Southern Division, one of its most active and combat-experienced leaders.

Disgusted by the signing and narrow acceptance of the Treaty, O'Malley led his division into opposition and played a senior role in the republican resistance to the new Irish Free State.

He was eventually seriously wounded while trying to evade capture. Unfit to stand

trial because of his wounds, public opinion would not stand for his execution. Imprisoned, he continued to fight on and, despite ill health, participated in the republican hunger strike of 1923. He was elected as a TD while in prison and in 1924, he was the last senior republican to be released by the Free State. Thereafter, he did not play the same active role but maintained friendships and took the side of the Spanish Republicans in the 1930's. He developed his existing cultural and intellectual interests and wrote and autobiography in two volumes, as well as poetry and literary criticism.

Yet, if O'Malley is remembered today, it is primarily for his role as a republican military commander, activist and chronicler of a seminal period in the history of this country. Others have remarked that "On another man's wound", the first volume of his autobiography, published in 1937, is "the best literary work to come out of the War of Independence", an opinion shared by this reviewer. The second volume, "The Singing Flame", was published posthumously in 1978 and is more personally and politically revealing.

This biography does not do the man or history justice. Essentially, this is a "revisionist" history that denies the democratic content of the war against Britain waged by Irish Republicans. The position of the anti-treaty forces is presented in a biased way, and systematically denigrated. By contrast, every author who supports the Free State is "authoritative". Of course, English has a right to take this position but if his views are to command respect, he needs to engage with the real arguments instead of avoiding them. He writes of the "unrealistic quality of the militant republican expectation" and, by extension, labels all those who fought against imperialism as politically immature. There were, however, other possibilities in this period. After all, 10,000 people marched in Dublin in 1928 to celebrate the October Revolution. Across Europe and farther afield, national and social struggles intertwined, empires fell and workers revolution was a serious and imminent possibility in many countries.

English goes on to dispute the significance of the size of the vote received by Sinn Fein in 1918. The fact remains that the then Sinn Fein party took three-quarters of the Irish Seats at Westminster and no amount of sophistry can deny this. His glib and negative treatment of Wolfe Tone is similarly objectionable and his assertion that republicanism has its roots in Catholicism is incorrect. Revolutionary nationalism in Ireland as elsewhere, was a product of the Enlightenment and not of any religious creed.

Plainly out of sympathy with his subject, English also treats O'Malley's relationship with his partner in a very denigrating manner. Coupled with this, for a book purporting to examine O'Malley's life from a number of angles, he does not pay any significant attention to the period that defined it: the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars.

Ernie O'Malley was one of the most singularly interesting of the republican leaders of the period. He deserves to be taken seriously and a better volume may do so in the future. In the meantime, I could not do better than to recommend his autobiography, which is far more insightful and a much better read.

Mike Scully

Too Good for Society

Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz by Eric Hobsbawm Weidenfeld and Nicolson £20

HOBBSBAWM'S ESSAYS are about ordinary people. In the introduction, he talks about the need to challenge "the enormous condescension of posterity" which has written out the contribution of many men and women. *Uncommon People* certainly does that.

This is a fine collection of essays, with pieces about the radical tradition, agrarian resistance, contemporary history (Vietnam 1968 and an especially stinging epitaph of villainous US congressman Roy Cohn). It might not be the place to expect a serious, loving and knowledgeable analysis of jazz. Yet this is what is in Eric Hobsbawm's latest work. Brilliant cultural historian, he identifies in jazz "the most serious contribution of the United States to world culture".

This is demonstrably true. But in modern conditions where rock music thrives (for Hobsbawm the "conscious manifesto of immaturity") and when folk music was seen as the natural choice of members of the communist party, it is good to see a Marxist champion jazz, especially as it is so often misunderstood and misrepresented.

He eloquently identifies the material conditions of the origins of jazz. These were the brothels of New Orleans where piano players played 24 hours a day. Funerals were also where jazz was first played. A suitable mournful dirge was played on the way to the burial and celebratory rhythmic airs on the way back.

Hobsbawm is wary of too crudely depicting jazz as a political expression. Indeed the 1960's phenomenon avant-garde "free jazz" with its politically radical programme or aggressive resistance was, if anything, over-self-conscious. But its free, formless style and deconstruction was most definitely an echo of political radicalism of the 1960's. Hobsbawm's heroes are the spirited geniuses. One is Sydney Bechet, who spent time and died in Paris to whom he devotes a chapter entitled "The Caruso of Jazz". He was, like many of the first generation of jazz musicians a creole and along with Louis Armstrong played what came to be known as swing. Others are the orchestra leaders, Count Basie and Duke Ellington, one of the first geniuses of jazz. Ellington's orchestra and many recordings spanned half a century. They played for a long stand in the Cotton Club in New York. There was a strong African influence in his music with exotic sounds in *Creole Love Call* and mournful minor sounds in something interestingly called *The Black and Tan fantasia*. Duke Ellington's music mixed in with blues. Both of these are intelligently portrayed and Hobsbawm clearly loves their work but is not entirely uncritical.

He is wrong when he says that Basie's last 30 years were a slow decline - check out the small group records of the 70's and particularly the wonderful band which Basie called My Luncheon Band in deference to the late Jimmy Lunceford for its precision and its propulsive swing.

Also discussed here is the covert revival of be-bop or modern jazz (- the one practiced so wonderfully by our own guitar master Louis Stewart, recently conferred with an honorary doctorate by Trinity College). Hobsbawm finds remarkable the conservatism of the new generation of bass jazz musicians. He asks if this very attitude doesn't rob the music of its own distinctive qualities, however skilled it might be otherwise.

He is not pessimistic about the future of jazz. "Jazz has shown extraordinary powers of survival and self-renewal inside a society not designed for it and which does not deserve it. It is too early to think that its potential is exhausted".

Colm O Sullivan

Sex and Class

Alexandra Kollantai on Women's Liberation (Introduction by Chanie Rosenberg) Bookmarks £2

ALEXANDRA KOLLANTAI was one of the most important fighters for women's liberation and sexual freedom this century. A new pamphlet with extracts of her work has been reproduced, including pieces from her book, *The Social Basis of the Women's Question*. Also included are her pamphlets *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle* and *Communism and the Family*.

Kollantai was born in Russia in 1872 to an aristocratic family but rejected her background when she became an active Marxist in 1896. She quickly became one of the leading figures in the struggle for women's liberation, often teaming up with Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg, attending many International Women's Conferences.

However it was in Russia where she made most impact. By 1907, the women's movement in Russia started to campaign for the right to vote. The movement was made up of women from all backgrounds, from aristocratic women to some of the poorest women in Russia, the Laundresses. Kollantai attacked the notion that there could be a united women's movement across the class divide, especially at a time when the strike movement was spreading and revolution approaching. Working class women suffered a double burden of exploitation and oppression. They needed to be part of the struggle for their own liberation and to change the overall system that oppressed them they had to organise alongside working class men for the overthrow of capitalism.

In 1908 an All Russian Women's Congress was organised, which Kollantai prepared a pamphlet for; *The Social Basis of the Women's Question*. The conference exposed the reality of the divisions inside the women's movement when uproar broke out in the debate of sickness benefit. One of the working women delegates for benefit argued "What do you know of our lives, bowling along in carriages while we are splashed by the mud?" In answer came the reply "It is precisely because bourgeois women do not have to endure such wretched lives that they were best qualified to fight for equal rights". Working class women's specific class interests were different to their richer "sisters". Bourgeois



women were more interested in maintaining their privileged position. This was the basis of Kollantai's pamphlet for the conference. Her arguments are strikingly relevant today. The gulf between those women who have gained from 1990's capitalism and those women today on low pay brings home the truth of Kollantai's view of the class divide among women.

By 1917 Russian Revolution, Kollantai had become one of the most popular Bolshevik figures. She was elected to the Petrograd Soviet by the sailors of the city. She became the Commissar of Social Welfare. She oversaw incredibly advanced social legislation for the time. Equality rights in marriage, simplicity of divorce, contraception and abortion rights on demand, the setting up of nurseries, well appointed communal living quarters, communal dining rooms and even warm rooms in factories so women could breast feed their babies in comfort. Today, 80 years on, there is nowhere that women have achieved these things.

Kollantai headed the special Women's Department, the Zhenotdel, set up by the Bolshevik Party from 1920-1921. She spent much time writing and speaking on sexual relations under the new workers state, the need for a "separation of the kitchen from marriage", personal relations and prostitution. She gave advice and encouragement for women to throw off their chains. Her two pamphlets in this collection "Communism and the Family" and "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle", were some of the most popular pamphlets of the time. Kollantai was not just concerned with changing the material conditions of women's oppression, which the Russian revolution achieved for a short period, but also the personal transformation of relationships and the concept of free love.

In her pamphlet on sexual relations she argued that "for the inequality of the sexes to be solved, it would be in terms of physical and emotional experience. People will find the 'magic key' when their ability to love is greater, when the idea of freedom in personal relationships becomes fact and when the principle of 'comradeship' triumphs over the traditional ideas of 'inequality' and submission."

Kollantai was a fantastic fighter for women's rights and her writings are a must for anyone wanting to fight for the real liberation of women today.

Joan Gallagher

Fifty years of the International Socialist Tradition

Ahmed Shawki interviews Tony Cliff

Shawki: What was the genesis of the theory of state capitalism? What caused you to question previous Marxist theory?

Cliff: I became a Trotskyist in 1933: The theory of state capitalism is a development of Trotsky's position. The emphasis on internationalism and the impossibility of socialism in one country, on the self-emancipation of the working class, on the reactionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy, all those are fundamental to Trotsky's position, and through him, to our theory as well.

But at the end of the Second World War, the perspectives that Trotsky had put forward were not realized. Trotsky wrote that one thing was certain, the Stalinist bureaucracy would not survive the war. It would either be overthrown by revolution or by counterrevolution. When the war ended in 1945, James P Cannon, the leader of the American Socialist Workers Party, recalled that Trotsky had said the Stalinist bureaucracy could not survive the war. The Stalinist bureaucracy was still there. It was proof the war hadn't ended, that the perspectives simply didn't work.

One of the reasons I came to Britain was to write a book on Eastern Europe. It was obvious for me that Eastern Europe is an extension of the Stalinist regime in Russia; state ownership, the same plan, the same state. Napoleon wrote that the army abroad is the state traveling. The Hungarian state, or the Polish state, were extensions of the Russian state.

This raised a problem. Some comrades in the Fourth International avoided it. For example, Ernest Mandel, its leading theoretician, wrote in 1948 that Russia was a workers' state; Eastern European countries were capitalist. You can say it, but either Eastern European countries were workers' states too or Russia was not. You can't have both. Now if Eastern European countries are workers states, then there are a number of conclusions. The first is that the heart of Marxism, that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class, doesn't apply here at all.

The workers played no role at all in establishing the Stalinist regimes. Even in China, the Chinese working class never recuperated from the massive defeats of the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, and therefore they played no role in establishing Mao's regime. So if you accepted that China and Eastern Europe are workers' states, then the working class is not crucial.

If the working class is not crucial, the concept that ideas are crucial is absolutely ridiculous. Why do you need ideas if you have tanks? Therefore you retreat from the concept of the working class as an actor in history. You retreat from the ideas of Marxism

as an important factor.

That is one alternative.

Or you can say something is wrong with the theory. The more convinced you are about basic Marxist ideas, the more you are ready to throw overboard things that are secondary to those basic ideas. If you are really convinced of your ideas you can face reality. But it was a very difficult period. For more than a month I had slept in the transition from the old theory to the new.

Shawki: What were the theoretical questions that the concept of state capitalism first grappled with?

Cliff: Ninety percent of any development of theory is not the answers but the questions. Once you ask the questions, you

It is half a century since Tony Cliff's seminal Marxist analysis of Stalinism, State Capitalism in Russia, was written. Ahmed Shawki interviewed Cliff on the origins of the theory and its continuing relevance for revolutionaries today

can see new theoretical possibilities. You ask the question, why did Trotsky take for granted that the Stalinist bureaucracy would not survive the war? Why did Trotsky take for granted that Russia is a workers' state? Trotsky defined Russia as a workers' state because of the form of property, the state form of property, the abolition of private property. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx defined communism in one sentence: the abolition of private property. And moreover, in Russia, state ownership came as a result of the proletarian revolution.

The question then becomes, what is the relation between the form of property and the relations of production? Marx did a critique of Proudhon in The Poverty of Philosophy, in which he says that Proudhon defines capitalism as private property. Marx next says that private property is a juridical abstraction, because private property existed under slavery, serfdom and capitalism. All are private property, but slavery, serfdom and capitalism are not the same. The form is private property, but the content, the social relations, are different. Now if the form and the content are not attached to one another, and you can have private property with capitalism or with slavery, then you can have capitalism with private property or with state ownership.

You view it historically, of course. Serfdom is usually connected with the lord of the manor, and with serfs in the villages around the manor. But there was also serfdom on the Catholic Church land, which was a quarter of all the land in Europe. On this church land the serfs were serfs, but there was no lord of the manor, and no right of inheritance. The property of the Church was called the patrimony of the poor.

The assumption was that it was not privately owned. So the form of property by itself doesn't apply.

In addition, Trotsky explained why he thought the bureaucracy was so unstable. He thought there were still two forces in Russia: the working class, fighting for state ownership, and the forces of capitalism, fighting to restore private ownership. Because of that, he believed the bureaucracy had no stable base.

Again, Trotsky assumed that the bureaucracy appears, as he put it, in the process of distribution.

He says, when there is a queue, you need somebody to control it, and the gendarme that controls the queue looks after number one. The source of the queue is scarcity. But the theoretical question that has to be asked is, why does scarcity exist?

In Russia they managed to send people to the moon, but they didn't manage to build enough houses. If the emphasis was on housing, or consumer goods, there would be less scarcity. The bureaucracy decides how to distribute flats, clothing or food. But previously the bureaucracy also appears in the decision over whether to produce flats, or to produce machines, heavy industry, tanks and airplanes. Therefore the bureaucracy appears not only in the process of distribution but also in the process of production.

The next question that arises theoretically is why are the priorities on heavy industry, on militarism.

They can launch Sputniks, but you can't get decent razor blades. Where do these priorities come from? Is it a question of Stalin being such a nasty piece of work that he doesn't want people enjoying themselves by having consumer goods? That explains nothing.

Trotsky speaks about the bureaucracy as being parasitic, on the assumption that there is no dynamism of production. But if there is this dynamism, there must be some other reason why workers are being oppressed. Marx argued in Capital that the anarchy of capitalist production is the other side of the tyranny of the individual enterprise. Because the capitalists compete with one another, in order to survive they have to accumulate. In order to accumulate they

have to exploit workers more and more. Therefore anarchy and tyranny are the two sides of the same coin.

What was the other side of the tyranny of Stalin? What anarchy did Stalin face? The anarchy was the pressure of world capitalism, and the pressure of world capitalism at that time took mainly military forms. Therefore, I came to the conclusion, that the same laws that Marx spoke about for the individual capitalist enterprise, applied to Russia as a capitalist, as a single capitalist unit.

The term state capitalism best fits the reality.

Shawki: How did the new theory help clarify the impasse of the Trotskyist movement?

Cliff: The theoretical breakthrough that state capitalism provided was important. It was immediately clear to us that Trotsky's perspectives were wrong. There was no great space for revolutionaries. The Stalinists themselves filled a very big area, and at the same time Stalinism gave indirect support, on a massive scale, to reformism. And reformism had solid support because of the postwar boom. What was obvious therefore was that in the immediate future Stalinism on the one hand and reformism on the other closed the path to us. This was depressing, but we had to face reality and develop realistic perspectives. That meant looking into the nature of Stalinism itself, to find the roots of its own destruction, and likewise with reformism.

Marx wrote about capitalism that "all that is solid melts into air." This applies to state capitalism and to reformism. I remember in 1956 when the Hungarian Revolution occurred. I didn't sleep for four nights, listening to the radio. It was confirmation that Stalinism was not a monolith, that class conflict was there, that workers were rising.

The theory also gave us the basis for continuing the struggle. To continue the struggle you must understand perspectives. Therefore the theory was fundamental to our survival. Fifty years ago the organization started with eight of us. We survived and we grew, while much bigger organizations based on faulty theories and perspectives have collapsed.

The soft Trotskyists who gave critical support of sorts to Stalinism collapsed. We survived because our basic theory was right. We made lots of mistakes, little mistakes, but the general sense of direction was right. And 50 years after the event, in a way you feel quite happy with it. If a theory is confirmed, it gives you strength to continue the struggle. And therefore our comrades are very confident in their ideas, very combative, because our theory has stood the greatest of all tests, the test of time, of history.

Shawki: What conclusions should revolutionaries draw from the great changes in Stalinism and capitalism in recent years?

Cliff: The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1989 opened a great space for revolutionary socialism throughout the world. The impact of this collapse was massive on the world Stalinist movement. In some cases the Communist Party practically disintegrated. In Britain, Nina Temple, the general secretary of the Communist Party, declared that the Socialist Workers Party was right, Russia is not socialist but state capitalist. That was as if the Pope declared that God doesn't exist in which case it would be very difficult to keep the Catholic Church intact.

In other places the Communist Parties

are a much greater influence, of a much greater size. But in these cases also, there has been a radical change in the nature of the party. In South Africa, in France, in Italy, the Communist Party became proponents of the market and privatization. They are no different from right-wing social democratic parties. At the same time, openings for the revolutionary left occurred through the collapse of Stalinism, a lot of space was opened for revolutionaries by the crisis of world social democracy, of reformism.

Since the war, until the early '70s, we had the longest boom in the history of capitalism. At that time the reformist parties delivered reforms. The Labour government from 1945 to 1951 preserved capitalism, but at the same time they achieved massive changes in the interests of working people.

The National Health Service was introduced. So was the 40-hour week. Every year 200,000 council houses were built.

By comparison, in 1996, only 600 council houses were built. We had public ownership of the railroads, the mines, gas, electricity—20 percent of industry was publicly owned. Reformist politics delivered reforms, and therefore the government was popular. From 1945-51, there were 43 by-elections. Labour won 42 out of 43, a fantastic achievement. Things have changed since then. So long as capitalism is expanding, the capitalist can get a big chunk in the form of profit, and workers get big crumbs in the form of good wages, or social services.

The question is how to build bridges to these people who agree with you in part, but continue to disagree on other things. The problem is to find bridges all the time to what is common between us and people outside us, without limiting ourselves to this, and still being able to raise the questions they don't agree with us on. We have to be able to cut with the grain and against the grain almost at the same time.

But if capitalism stagnates, then the workers have to give way. Because there is one thing you cannot have—capitalism without profit. The priority under capitalism is profit.

In the last 20 years, the total output in manufacturing and industry in Britain rose by less than 2 percent. For the 20 years before, output rose by 86 percent. Within that 86 percent, there was a big space for reforms. We are now confronted with reformist parties which don't deliver reforms. Under the last Labour government, from 1974-79, no significant reforms were delivered. Unemployment rose to 1.7 million. There was a cut in real wages. There was closure of hospital wards, and even of complete hospitals. The result was the reformist Labour government became very unpopular. During that Labour government of 1974-79, Labour lost 16 of the 31 by-elections.

I have no doubt whatsoever that under Tony Blair's government, when there are even more attacks on workingclass conditions.

For a whole historical period reformists were able to bring about labor reforms. When Lenin says that the only way to achieve reforms is by revolutionary struggle, it applied in Russia in 1905. It did not apply in Britain

in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s. It did not apply in Europe since the war. It didn't apply to the United States for a long time. Workers achieved reforms without revolutionary struggle. But the path of reform is closing. It is much more difficult to achieve reform now than, let's say, 10 years ago. This is one of the reasons why the reformist leaders are promising less than they used to, and have moved massively to the right.

At the same time, however, workers have no confidence they can achieve reforms by revolutionary struggle. They don't have enough confidence, enough unity, enough experience of a working class in struggle. Nor do they have confidence in achieving reforms by reformist efforts. This is why there is a very high level of apathy, and a very contradictory consciousness. Their consciousness is contradictory because of the situation. There is a lot of anger and at the same time this lack of confidence. The anger comes because the situation grows worse and worse with declining conditions and job insecurity. The lack of confidence comes from years of bureaucratic control, years of low level of struggle. And with that combination in these people when you say "Enough is enough" they nod their heads. But when you say, "Let's do something about it" then it's "Oh, wait, I'm not sure. I agree with you but our mates are not ready."

The question is how to build bridges to these people who agree with you in part, but continue to disagree on other things. The problem is to find bridges all the time to what is common between us and people outside us, without limiting ourselves to this, and still being able to raise the questions they don't agree with us on. We have to be able to cut with the grain and against the grain almost at the same time.

The difficulty is that, despite the crisis and the openings for the revolutionary left, we are still on the margin. There is not yet a mass movement in terms of activity, in which we could be a significant factor. This applies to Britain and to the United States. In France and some other places, the mass movement comes and goes.

The problem for us is that for a long, long time we have been a propaganda organization. Even at present 90 percent of our time is propaganda—discussing ideas, selling the paper, talking to individual workers. Ten percent at most is agitation. In some specific things we act—we lead strikes, in Brent, in Salford, at UCH hospital. So the question of our ability to move from propaganda, to agitation or from agitation to propaganda is very, very important. We have to repeat the argument that the only way to achieve reforms is by revolutionary struggle. This is becoming more and more true in Britain and the United States and elsewhere. Whether we lead straight-away to that, or we only remain at the level of propaganda, we still have to see. But even one big victory could be the signal that gives confidence to workers elsewhere, an event that spreads, and gives clearer shape to the contradictory period we are in.

Shawki: How does the rise of the fascist right in Europe affect revolutionary perspectives?

Cliff: We face real dangers. The crisis of reformism leaves a space for revolutionaries, but also it leaves a space for the fascists. In France in 1981, there were presidential elections. The Socialist candidate, Francois Mitterand, got 57 percent of the vote. The fascist candidate, the leader of the National Front, Le Pen, had the support of less than 1 percent. Fourteen years of

Socialist rule, Mitterand died, and there were new presidential elections. The Socialist candidate, Jospin, got 23 percent of the vote. Le Pen got 15 percent, and Chirac, a right winger, won the presidency.

In Italy the Christian Democrats and the Socialists dominated politics for decades and didn't deliver reforms for many, many years. In the last election in April 1994 the Christian Democrats got a tiny number of MPs and the Socialists didn't win one seat. The fascists took 115 seats. But the party that became the biggest in the Italian parliament was the PDS Communist Party with over 200 MPs. The reason is simple. The Socialists had formed the government twice. The Communists could turn around and say, "We have never been in the government. We are not responsible for all the muck."

The situation is extremely volatile. I mentioned in France the growth of the right, but at the same time there were massive strikes that paralysed the government. In Italy as well: Silvio Berlusconi, the right winger, took control of the government in alliance with the fascists. Six months later the government fell as a result of mass strikes.

France is more volatile than Britain. One of the reasons the fascists find it more difficult to expand in Britain than in France is because the unions in Britain are proportionately three to four times stronger in size. The fascists find it very difficult to invade the unions. Where the workers are not organized, it is much easier for them. And in France the unions are divided into three confederations, plus autonomous unions. Because the unions are smaller and weaker, the union bureaucracy is less in control of the situation. There is more leeway for spontaneous strikes stemming from the ranks, for trade union democracy. Yet at the same time the weakness of the unions means that there is more space for the fascists to act.

I don't believe that a victory of one side over the other is inevitable. But one thing is absolutely clear: the reformists cannot consolidate the situation because the crisis is too deep. And when the crisis is too deep the extremes will win. Either one extreme or another extreme. It will go backwards and forwards for quite some time, unlike the 1930s.

I remember the 1930s, and I have the feeling that I'm seeing the same film for the second time—mass unemployment, a rise in racism, the growth of the fascists. But this time the film goes much slower. In Germany from the crash of 1929 to the deep crisis of 1930-31 was a very short time.

Unemployment reached eight million straight away. In Germany today it has gone from the crisis of the 1970s onward. It goes up and down. There are now 4.7 million unemployed in Germany, but the sharpness and impact on workers' lives is much less deep than in the '30s. Then unemployment benefits didn't exist. Today, unemployment benefits in Germany are higher than the average wage in Britain. So workers are not starving, things are not as extreme as they were in the '30s. But the trend is like it was in the '30s, although the tempo is much slower. That means it is more possible to stop it than it was in the '30s.

We have to fight the fascists but also try to stop the conditions that make fascism grow. And those are conditions of frustration, disappointment and suffering. Socialism is a movement of hope; fascism is a movement of despair. The tragedy of the reformists is that they don't give hope and they don't know how to deal with despair.

In 1977 the fascists in Britain, the Na-

tional Front, were really on the march, they were expanding, they probably had 30-40,000 members at the time. We decided to stop them. So 2,000 of us went to Lewisham, where the Front was going to march in south-east London, where a lot of Black people live. And 2,000 of our comrades mobilized about 10,000 local Black youth. Together we broke through the police cordon and smashed the National Front. We launched the Anti Nazi League out of this action.

Yet at that time, Michael Foot, the deputy leader of the Labour Party, said he doesn't know which is worse, the Socialist Workers Party or the National Front. He called us "red fascists." When Stalin called social democrats "social fascists," he was an idiot. But social democrats are inadequate to the job of fighting fascists. They are accustomed to parliamentary democracy, to the legal system, and they don't know how to organize people in the streets.

It was the same in the 1930s. In Britain in 1936 Mosley's Blackshirts tried to march at Cable Street, a Jewish area of East London. The Communist Party mobilized 100,000 people and they stopped Herr Mosley. They broke the back of Mosley's movement. The Labour Party told people at that time, "Don't go to East London. Remain at home. Let them march."

More shocking is the incompetence of German reformism when Hitler came to power. I remember when Hitler became Prime Minister of Germany on the 30th of January, 1933. The leader of the Social Democratic Party in the Reichstag told people don't worry, there are only six Nazis in the cabinet. The majority of the cabinet are conservatives. Don't worry because the President is not a Nazi, but is the conservative, Field Marshal Hindenburg. Don't worry because in a few months time, in April, there are going to be general elections. Don't worry—that was the line. Then Hermann Goering, the Nazi Minister of the Interior, banned the Communist Party and arrested a number of socialist candidates for the Reichstag. The Nazis then won the elections.

The leadership of the union federation announced, "For over 60 years we collaborated with the Social Democratic Party. From now on, we are going to collaborate with the National Socialist Workers Party of Germany (the Nazis). Hitler said thank you very much, and then banned the unions. Even more extreme—if anything can be more extreme—was the position of the engineers union. Hider's coming to power was greeted by their paper with the headline "Victory for Socialism."

Shawki: What ongoing relevance does the theory of state capitalism have for today?

Cliff: The crisis of reformism and the collapse of Stalinism has created a fantastic opening for revolutionary socialism. It is much easier to build a revolutionary organization now than it was 20 or 30 years ago. Then if someone moved to the left automatically they would say "I am a Communist," and Communist meant Stalinist. To become a Trotskyist was extremely difficult.

Stalinism marginalized and isolated Trotskyism very effectively. The Trotskyists were by and large in tiny little groups with hardly any influence. Never before had revolutionaries been so marginalized. Even at the beginning of this century the Marxist forces were much more influential than the Trotskyists ever were. Stalinism represented massive political retrogression for the international working-class movement.

The problem for revolutionaries, for Trotskyists, in the years after the Second World War, was how to connect with the long historical chain of the revolutionary tradition. Unless we were clear that Stalinism was bound to collapse through its internal contradictions, we could not find a way to connect with the old revolutionary traditions of the working-class movement from the Chartist movement in Britain in the 1840s to the Paris Commune in 1871 to the 1917 Russian revolution.

The theory of state capitalism was a small link, connecting the long chain of the revolutionary tradition of the past with the future reappearance of a mass revolutionary movement.

Not grasping the nature of the Stalinist regimes as state capitalist, the so-called orthodox Trotskyists went completely adrift after the war. This culminated in Michel Pablo, the secretary of the Fourth International, speaking about centuries of "progressive Stalinism," and Posadas, a leader of the Latin American Trotskyists, calling on the Soviet Union to launch a nuclear war on the United States, saying if only 10 people remained alive it wouldn't matter because the victory of Communism would be assured. If I was one of the 10, I would prefer the victory of cannibalism.

Of course these are comic excesses. But the rise of the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe and China caused orthodox Trotskyism to enter a cul-de-sac. The only way of breaking out was the theory of state capitalism.

When we started in Britain we were by far the smallest group among the Trotskyist organizations. Those much larger organizations have disintegrated and we have survived. The reason is simple, the theory of state capitalism. When Stalinism collapsed, we were not damaged. On the contrary, we were confirmed in our ideas, while they lost their confidence. For a revolutionary organization, the most important thing is confidence in ideas. Ideas are the most important thing for us—the confidence of our ideas in the future.

Because of our theory of state capitalism we viewed socialism not from the vantage point of state ownership, but from the self-activity of the working class. This brought us back to the basic heart of Marxism. It meant that in every situation we looked to the independent activity of the rank and file.

In Britain we couldn't fight the Stalinist bureaucracy, but in every strike we fight to keep workers independent of the trade union bureaucracy. The basic fact that we always rely on rank-and-file self-activity means that we are not demoralized when the movement goes wrong. Not every strike wins: many strikes are sold down the river by the union bureaucracy. But we are not responsible for the defeat of the strike. We argue this correctly, the right policy, the right tactics, the right strategy for workers in struggle.

In British terms, those that attach themselves to the idea of socialism from above, attach themselves to the trade union bureaucracy. They came in to the union bureaucracy, they sell out every time they become demoralized.

Our ideas kept us alive, and we broke through when in local situations we found the opportunity to expand. It took 10 years for our tiny group to grow from eight to 60. Then in a couple of years we went to 400. Then we stagnated at 400, between 1964 and 1968. Then with the Vietnam War we grew from 400 in April of 1968 to 1000 in October of 1968. Again and again you jump forward, then stagnation, even retreat a little bit, then again a jump forward. On the foundation of what we did originally, we can do a little bit better at each next stage.

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